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Dragonfly

GAY LEFT

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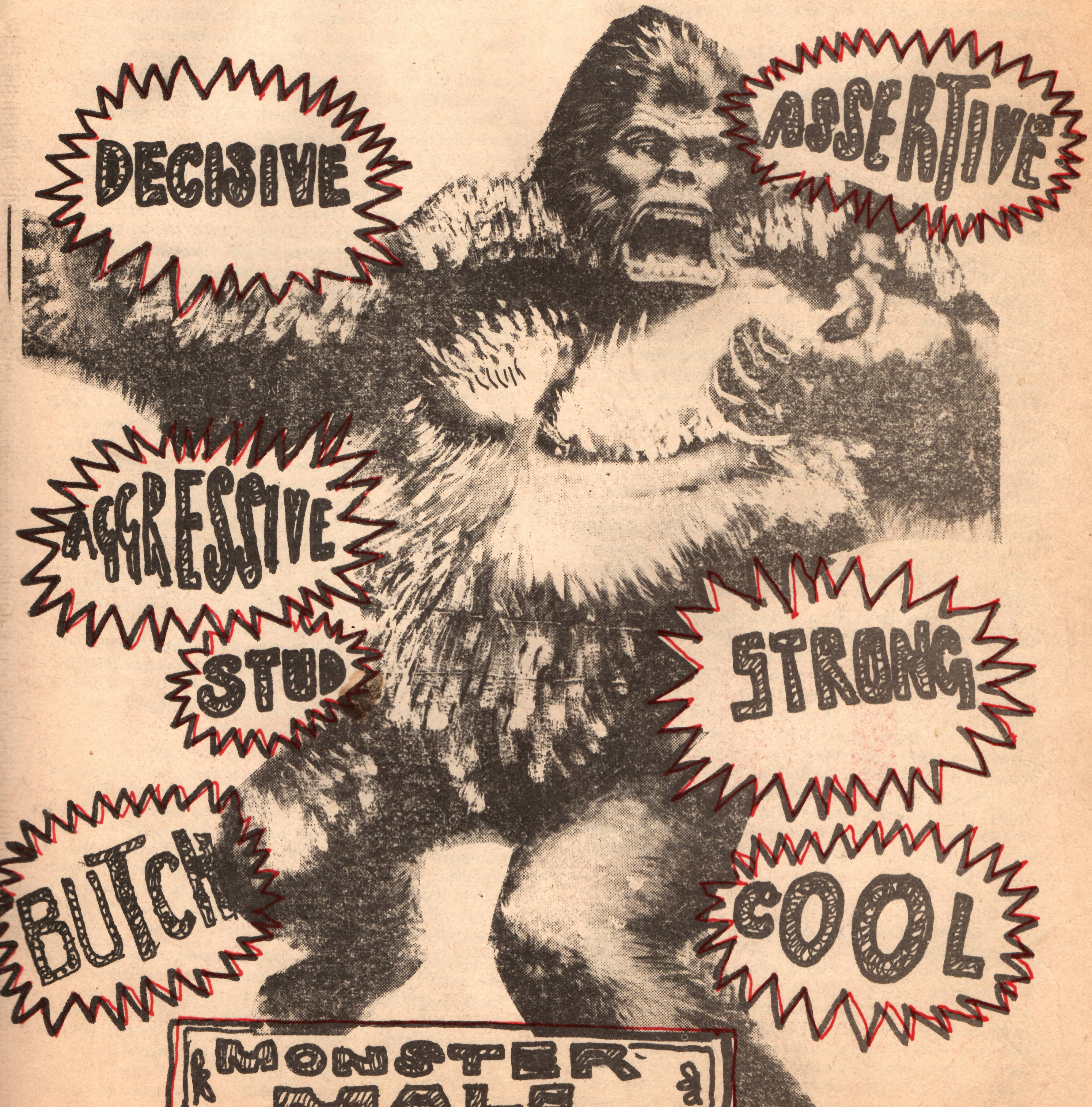
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Love, Sex and Maleness

by the Gay Left Collective

In the latter part of the 19th Century Friederich Engels noted the 'curious fact . . . a phenomenon common to all times of great agitation, that the traditional bonds of sexual relations, like all fetters, are shaken off'. We are living in a time of 'great agitation' and many of the sexual chains that once enwrapped us like swaddling clothes are relaxing, giving many of us the opportunity to breathe a little more freely. The much touted 'sexual revolution' of the boom years after World War II saw a partial redefinition of sexuality, with the family firmly supported by the apparatus of the Welfare State, with women ideologically and economically subordinated within a consumer oriented capitalism but with the technology of birth control spreading – unevenly, but still spreading – and allowing women to begin to assume control of their own fertility, the state began to relax its grip of sexuality, and opened up a 'free space'.

The 1960s saw a series of measures which 'liberalised' (a key word) attitudes towards a number of 'deviant' forms of sexual behaviour. Abortion was not legalised, but within certain narrowly defined limits (limits now being even more closely defined with the connivance of some Labour MPs) it was decriminalised. Similarly male homosexuality was not made legal, but you could now do it – if you were over 21, in private, in England and Wales. These were concessions, liberalisations not liberation, but they opened the sluices. The women's movement and the gay liberation movement, simultaneously products and challenges to the sexual liberalism of the 1960s, are a result.

But despite all the changes that have taken place, no challenge has been made to conventional gender role stereotypes. Homosexuality has expanded its free space *within* existing conceptions and behaviour patterns. Some of the fringes are now tinted a faint pink. Some straight men wear earrings in their left (and right) ears just like some gay men. But essentially, images of maleness, ideologies of masculinity, remain unchallenged. Male homosexuals, no less than women, gay or straight, have to define themselves in relationship to their stereotypes, either by outright acceptance of male stereotypes or by challenge and criticism. For a male homosexual has to find an identity both in terms of a *sexuality* which is still only partially condoned, and in terms of a male *gender* identity which carries with it strong ideological presumptions about how a *man* should behave, socially and sexually.

Gay Left over the past few months has in group discussions been attempting to locate the problems. This collective article is not a programme for action but an agenda for debate. It concentrates on 'maleness' both because the writers are men and because this is an area that has been almost ignored. In the early part of the century the sex psychologist Havelock Ellis commented that male sexuality was not a problem, because it was direct and forceful. It was female sexuality that needed to be explored. Today we can no longer say that with his sublime certainty. The challenges posed by the women's movement and the gay movement have opened up a new area for men to debate – the question of their own 'masculinity', social and sexual.

Patriarchy

The first division of labour, as Engels noted, was between the sexes. This was probably based on a simple biological fact: that women bore children, and men did not. Engels and most theorists, even on the left, have almost to the present erected upon this a massive ideological framework, based on a form of biological determinism: the belief that the social characteristics of the male and the female are inherent, physiologically predetermined, 'natural'. This view was as true of Engels as of Herbert Spencer, of Havelock Ellis as of the most conservative psychologist. What recent studies (as summed up in Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society*), not to say the practice of the gay and women's movement, have suggested is an alternative approach: a more materialist and potentially socialist approach. Gender, the social characteristics we define as masculine or feminine, is a cultural creation. Conceptions of masculinity and femininity, of motherhood and fatherhood, have varied enormously in different cultures. In our own they are highly articulated, ideologically fixed, and economically and socially buttressed. But they are, nonetheless, historical creations.

Patriarchy has taken various forms in different societies and has now been largely moulded to meet the specific needs of capitalism, though some inevitable contradictions remain. Under capitalism certain gender characteristics are spotlighted – those which are seen as central to the functioning and continuation of the system. For instance ideologies of motherhood and theories of maternal deprivation serve to narrowly define a woman's role. Bourgeois ideology and the socialisation process strive to make all gender characteristics appear natural. Men have the dominant role in the production of commodities and the characteristics which are seen as central to the needs of capitalism have become 'male' ones, market relations imply competition, aggression and extreme individualism, qualities that are defined as 'male'. These same characteristics and actions extend into sexuality. Men are expected to dominate. Men are considered to have a sexual drive while women are expected to have more emotional needs. Men take the initiative in sexual encounters. Men need to prove themselves through repeated sexual activity. Men learn to compete with one another for women. Men are socialised to be sexual predators.

Sex

An ideology that explains behaviour in terms of naturalness or instincts implies that behaviour or attitudes or ways of doing things are unchanging and permanent. Therefore, we are told that any attempt to change 'natural' behaviour through conscious collective behaviour is futile. We believe that many forms of our behaviour are not natural but learned through a complicated process of interaction with other groups and individuals who, themselves, take as given a set of beliefs designed to preserve the status quo.

At no point is the belief in the natural and universal human more entrenched than in the study of sexuality. In studying the sexual there has been an overwhelming concern with the power of biology and nature. We would like to challenge this belief by the concept of sexualisation. At its simplest, it describes the process by which an individual comes to *learn* about sex and sexuality. We want to investigate the meanings that are attached to sex organs and to sexual conduct.

Two or more people cannot have sex together unless they recognise that the physical acts that they perform are sexual and that they are performing a 'sexual act'. The social meaning given to the physical acts stimulate biological events, not the other way around. For example, being examined by a nurse in a VD clinic or by a gynaecologist or practising mouth-to-mouth resuscitation all involve physical activities similar to those that take place in sex. But the social situation and the people concerned do not define it as sexual and, therefore, no excitement occurs.

This process of sexualisation occurs throughout our lives in all the areas where the more general socialisation takes place: the family, friends and peers, school and the mass media. The crucial point is that sexualisation revolves around the general socialising process whereby girls learn to be feminine and boys masculine. But the linkage is not automatic; otherwise there could never be such a thing as a homosexual. The socialisation process is strong but the multifaced possibilities of sexualisation are even stronger.

The Process Of Becoming Sexual

Young children experiment with many different kinds of behaviour whenever it is physically possible for them to do so. They do not differentiate their behaviour into sexual and non-sexual categories because they have not learned what those terms mean. Children play with their own or other children's penises, vaginas or anuses as casually as they play with their toes, a toy bear or the cat. Pleasure is the criterion which dictates their actions. But the child does not operate in a vacuum. Parents or guardians will react in different ways to the child's behaviour using their own adult experience and attach their own meanings of it to the child's behaviour. Certain acts and forms of behaviour will be described as sexual by the adult not because of the child's sense of experience, but because of the meanings attached to those acts by adult observers whose only available language is that of adult sexual experience.

Parents or adults react so that the child learns what acts are sexual and what acts are not. This can be a very subtle process or a harsh one according to the type of 'discipline' preferred by the adult. Punishments can take many forms and will be incurred by the child if it enters into the realm of what the adult considers to be 'improper' behaviour. Children soon learn that certain types of behaviour with regard to their own and other children's genitals are very different from other types of behaviour that may get little or no reaction. For example, when a boy touches his penis, the adult will often impute to the child motivations that are generally associated with adult masturbation, but which to the child is not a sexual activity in the adult sense, but merely a diffusely pleasurable activity, like many others. As the children grow up, they may not stop masturbating, but they will certainly learn to restrict that activity to certain times and places. Most sexual activity will be restricted by a strong sense of guilt. Punishment and the instilling of guilt are important ways of teaching a child what is sexually permissable and what is not. The imposition of guilt and the creation of taboos reinforce each other.

The Learning Of Heterosexuality

As well as learning what constitutes sexual behaviour, does a child also learn who and what to find sexually attractive and desirable? We believe that, to a large degree, we learn our sexual orientation which, in our society means to learn how to be heterosexual. We are not born with heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual drives but with the potential of experiencing physical pleasure, finding many different people, activities, things exciting, all of which at times may be orgasmic. We reject the theory which states that the innate sexuality of humans leads them automatically to express it with the oppsite sex, so that anything other than this means that the non-conforming individual is abnormal.

The family, as a basic unit of social life, is founded on the heterosexual couple. History, literature, art and the mass media all are based on the normality of heterosexuality. There are few references to any other forms of sexual behaviour. The few that are, are couched in terms of sin, madness, sickness, immature development or deviancy.

The family monitors very carefully the personalities, interests and behaviour patterns of their sons and daughters. The presence of 'sissie' characteristics in a boy is viewed much more seriously than the 'tomboy' activities of girls – a sissie being a much more contemptuous and derisory label than tomboy. Many aspects of 'masculinity' are synonymous with the personal elements necessary to succeed within capitalism so if a boy lacks in these traits his future success is potentially jeopardised. So subtle and sometimes not so subtle hints are thrown his way: 'Surely you wouldn't want to grow up to be a sissie?' The expression of feminine characteristics runs counter to male supremacy, the family and fundamental values of capitalism. Fears for the boy's success are also linked up with the fear that he may become a homosexual. Parents often see the development of this in their sons as a stigma that reflects back to them.

The heterosexual ideal is further reinforced by the boy's peers. All of us are judged by friends according to how neatly we fit into the gender stereotype of our sex. Even adolescent boys who enter into homosexual behaviour will be seen to reinforce ideals of proper male behaviour, for example in mutual masturbation over the pictures in *Playboy.*

Sex Education

Men are often assumed to know instinctively about sex, especially how to 'do it'. Not only is this an expectation we have of ourselves and other men, but something women expect of us as well. Sex education rarely discusses technique. If men are supposed to know it all then there is little need for men to be taught. Contained in sex education material is an assumption that the man must have an orgasm. As a person whose role is defined in terms of achievement and production, a man will look for achievement and production in his sex life. The ejaculate is a *product*; it is a sign, like the experiencing of an orgasm, that the man has *achieved* something. In the face of these sorts of gratifications being sought by men from sex it is little wonder that sex-education material limits itself to describing sex acts that are male orgasmic and potentially fertile.

Talking About Sex

As men our sexual prowess is an assumed part of our identity. In competing with other men we will use a form of

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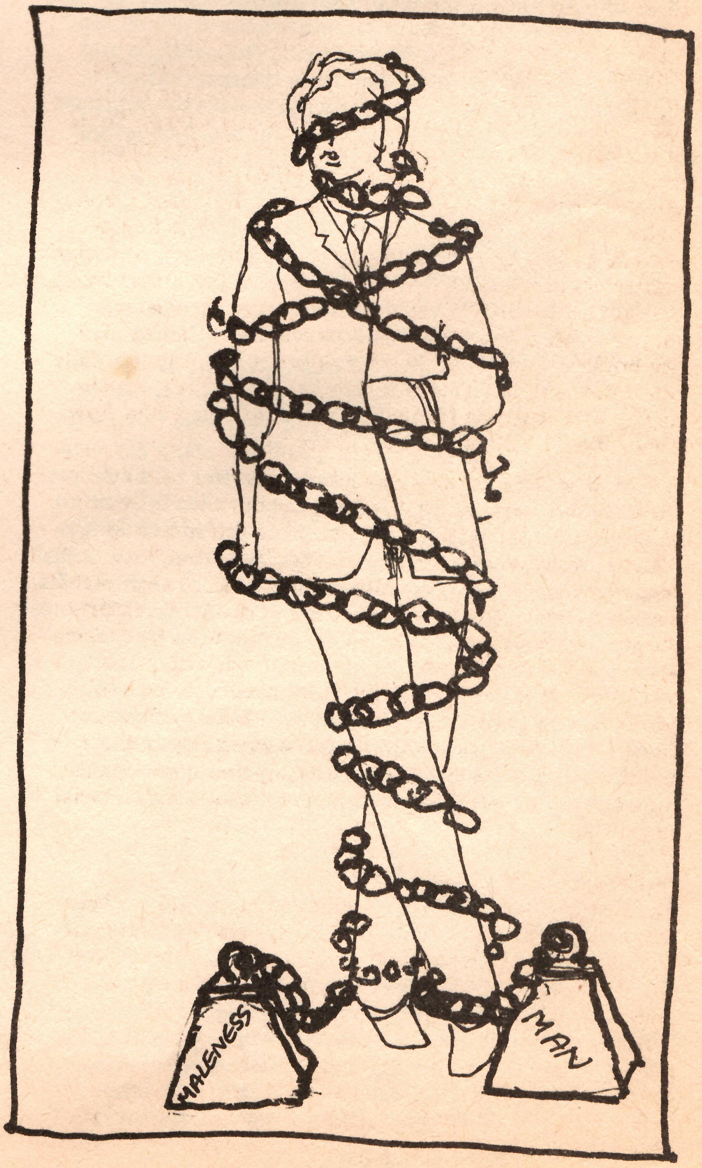


language to boost our maleness. Our conversations with other men are likely to be totally based around asserting our competence and these communcations will always be couched in slang. Moreover the only words in this vocabulary are assertive or descriptive of parts of people's bodies.

We cannot talk to other men about our sexual weaknesses. Firstly this is because men are taught to compete with each other not to show weakness. Secondly the male slang vocabulary does not contain words for what many men feel to be problems. There is no slang word for premature ejaculation for example. Men use slang to degrade other people or assert themselves by boasting about their sexual prowess but cannot speak with one another on a factual basis about their weaknesses.

There are other reasons why men talk about sex in the way they do. In our society sex is seen as a private intimate matter between two people. Personal sex experiences are not openly talked about. We are unlikely to have heard our parents talk about sex. Children asking about sex are likely to be greeted with embarrassed silences. In some ways sex has become like work, a routine part of our lives, our service to the state, and talking about it is a non-essential. If people did talk honestly about their personal sexual experiences they may develop new ideas, may discover that sex need not be the way we were taught. In the sense that talking about anything spreads information and increases the level of knowledge of the people, talking about sex may divert people from the 'normal' method of sex, procreative 'work' sex.

Homosexuality and Maleness

Attitudes to homosexuality are set within this general framework. The different cultural histories of lesbians and male homosexuals are built around gender divisions. Gay men are socialised from birth as men. The conflicts and guilt in many of our lives stem from the fact that our homosexuality is in conflict with our gender assumptions. Our learnt 'maleness' is carried into our social behaviour with women as well as our sexual with other men. The problems raised by this are whether we maintain the basic characteristics of heterosexual maleness or recognise that the contradictions caused by our sexuality mean that our masculine conditioning is fundamentally questioned and changed.

Homosexual Maleness

The growing awareness of our homosexuality leads to enormous conflicts. For those who accept some part of their gay selves, social pressures and the desire to fit within the heterosexual framework mean that many gay men view their homosexuality as simply a matter of sexual preference, concerning what is done in bed, with little or no relevance to the rest of our lives. In towns and cities it is easier for gay men to express themselves purely in a sexual way through the gay subculture. The open expression of a gay lifestyle at home, at work, and in public has little social legitimacy and meets with strong prohibitions both social and legal.

Sexual And Emotional Divisions

The effect of these prohibitions is to make most gay men split their gay life from other parts of their lives. Such splitting is not strange to men for we are all conditioned to divide our lives into different compartments. But there is a particular intensity surrounding the split in gay men's lives by virtue of the fact that some compartments are socially acceptable and others are not. The nature of the split varies from person to person and whilst some are crushed by it others negotiate livable compromises with it.

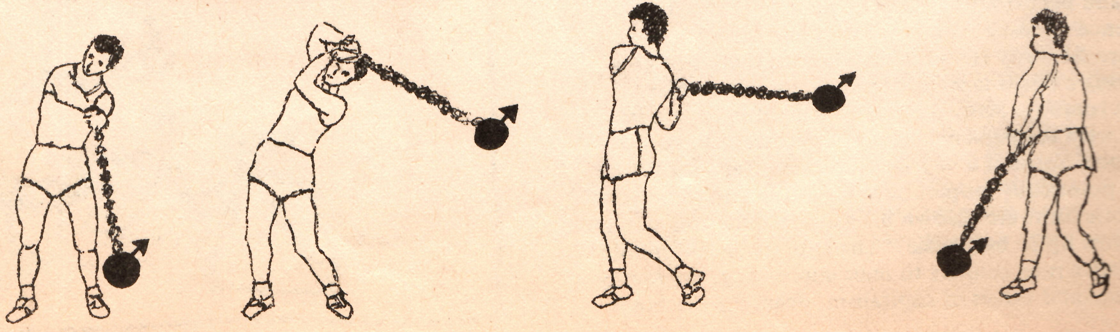
Some men lead lives which are apparently totally straight – they may be married, ogle over page 3 in *The Sun* and so on – but every so often they will go in search of gay sex perhaps in a cottage or in Hampstead Heath or some other fairly anonymous place. For some it will simply be a pleasant experience but for others it will be a torment which dominates the rest of their lives. Another group of gay men live out the split in a different way – they have two circles of acquaintances, one gay, one straight. The gay acquaintances are never given a phone number at work and the straight acquaintances are never asked to do anything socially at the weekends. The two worlds are quite exclusive. Another group are those whose lifestyle is openly gay but yet separate their sexual activity from their emotional relationships. Their gayness is publicly integrated into the rest of their lives, they write letters as openly declared gays to *The Times* and *Socialist Worker,* they form close friendships with gays and straights but that stability is absent from their sexual relationships. Most of these are casual and although they may be affectionate, they remain separate.

The split takes many other forms than these and, in itself, is not necessarily harmful. The harm lies in the fact that it is imposed and, therefore, restricts all our potential for relating to others. The restrictions on the way we can assert our gay identity make it difficult not to have great expectations about sexual activity which make it either very aggressive or perceived to be a failure of some kind. Male conditioning provides a model for the values and expectations of gay men. It also has a strong competitive element and puts a strong emphasis on genital sex and fucking. Sexual activity is then seen in terms of the number of orgasms, time spent on it, the size of erection and so on.

Lack of erection is a major humiliating disaster if sexual performance is the sole basis of our gay identity. Not only do we feel a sexual failure but the whole of our life seems less than satisfactory. Often when the so-called 'sexual problem' is explored clinically it is discussed in terms of inadequacy or deviancy, or both, and thus the whole syndrome is reinforced.

The concept of 'potency' is the result of the imposed 'masculine' role which concentrates on genital centred sex, orgasm and the whole performance ethic which surrounds it.

In discussing in the collective what we thought our own sexual hang-ups were, we quickly realised that there was no easy definition of even what 'having sex' constituted. No one felt it had to relate to fucking or genital centred sex and there was no consensus that orgasm was necessary. At the same time we discovered that many of us had similar fears about maintaining erection, non-orgasm and the whole nature of the sexual performance syndrome. For all of us it was a positive experience to find that our fears and doubts were not individual nor exceptional. This individualising of a 'problem' is encouraged in



Perhaps one day . . .

conventional psychiatric approaches to the question of sexual performance and being a man.

As long as gay men continue to view 'masculinity' and sexual role playing as being prime aspects of their personality, they are likely to substantially restrict the development of an identity which is free from bourgeois divisions between masculine and feminine.

Sexual Objectification

Because the sexual aspect of our gayness is so strongly emphasised we are likely to view other men as sex objects. In the gay subculture there are often distinct hierarchies of sexual idolatory. For example active, butch men are often seen as the most desirable. Initial appearance and style are excessively important as the goal is largely that of sexual contact.

Gay men can meet each other for mainly sexual reasons in pubs, clubs, sauna baths and 'cottages'. Choices may be even further narrowed by men responding to specific sexual signals such as leather and denim, coloured hankies, keys and earrings. The framework of these ways of meeting is highly structured and reflects many elements of capitalist society and male role playing. For example, competitiveness is rife in terms of looks, age, money and style; whilst another element, aggression, is also a useful attribute in making particular sexual sorties.

In this kind of situation sexual objectification brings out some of the worst aspects of male conditioning. The turnover of people as commodities, sexual objects to be discarded when used, is very high. We are confronted by the competitive nature of capitalism coupled with the manly role of aggression but it does not wear the camouflage that is built around the supposedly 'natural' predatoriness of heterosexual men in their relationships to women.

Relationships

Human beings need contact with each other. This is obviously true of the productive work that they engage in and it is just as true of other parts of their lives. People relate to one another in many different ways, whether through sexual, emotional, physical or intellectual contact. Despite the so-called sexual revolution of recent years, a stable monogamous relationship is still seen as the right place for most sexual contact to happen. Just as there are pressures on heterosexual women and men to form loving stable relationships (acceptable outside marriage nowadays) so for gay people there is a pressure to form comparable relationships with others, despite the remaining taboos against homosexuality. Relationships between gay men tend to fluctuate between casual sex and more sustained relations ranging from a short while to many years.

It is in the areas of short term sexual relationships that we can identify what is most male in gay men's attitudes to sex. We do not deny that for many of us short term sexual encounters are stimulating and pleasurable. However, frequent sex and sexual objectification have always been the prerogative of men in bourgeois society, and as gay men we are part of this syndrome. For a man to like sex and pursue it with many partners is considered a sign of virility while for a woman to do the same is to invite the label of nymphomaniac.

Another reflection of gay men's attitudes towards sex and relationships is the question of 'ending' as opposed to 'change' in both short term and long term relationships. Because men are encouraged to see their lives as a series of tasks which are completed in themselves (ie boyhood – manhood – worker – family man – careerist – managing director) so they view relationships in a more rigid manner than women. Gay men seem to end relationships more rapidly when they do not fulfil their expectations and to start up new ones with equal rapidity. Change is a process of growth and development which is absent from this pattern.

For many gay men casual sex always remains important, even when relationships and friendships have been established with other gay men. This is partly because of the male attitude towards separating things, partly because of the identity-giving nature of casual sex and partly because of the sheer pleasure involved.

Long Term Relationships

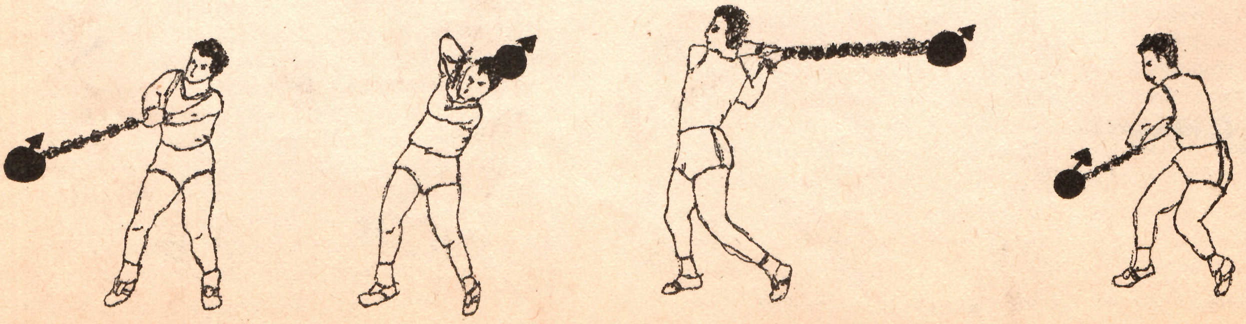
Long term relationships may develop from sexual encounters and, as with heterosexual women and men, they are centred on a wider series of shared interests. Three main areas in gay male relationships show the influence of heterosexual norms and values. The first is role playing which structures gay men's attitudes. Within gay relationships, role playing can occur as in heterosexual ones, with one person taking on 'feminine' roles and the other 'masculine'. The second aspect is that of monogamy and faithfulness. With heterosexual men and women sex outside is sometimes allowed as long as it is not publicised and only happens occasionally. With gay men involved in long term relationships a similar situation arises whereby it is often permissible to have casual sex and go to cottages and go to saunas. Each partner is allowed to be sexually promiscuous as long as he is emotionally monogamous. The third aspect is centred around buying or sharing property such as a house. This becomes a symbol of a shared possession. For example through the home people are able to relate to the couple and it is an important expression of their relationship.

Many aspects of gay male relationships reflect their heterosexual counterparts but it is too deterministic to say that they are total reflections. We have a much greater area of freedom for our relationships to develop outside the confines of these roles. The possibility exists in relationships between people of the same sex of a questioning of such 'natural' roles. For example, there is more likelihood of a greater degree of economic equality and independence.

Long term relationships provide a centre to life and way of living which enables many of us to stand back from the constant seeking of one night stands. We realise that for many men the gay commercial scene is totally unacceptable and the only way they can relate to people is in terms of long standing relationships which place sex in the perspective of a loving relationship.

Romantic Love And Emotions

Some gay men place greater emphasis on their emotional rather than sexual needs. They may take part in as much casual sex as anyone else but pickups are seen not just as sexual partners but as potential affairs and lovers. Gay coupling does not have as strong a materialist base as heterosexual coupling. But our emotional structuring,



I'll have the strength . . .

buttressed by a powerful ideology, is so strong that many of us come to believe that such a relationship is the only way to find 'real personal fulfilment'. The concept of romantic love is given great importance in our society and is closely tied to the way our emotional needs have been moulded. Ideas can become real, material forces. The reification of the concept of romantic love has made it an integral part of our socialised emotions and needs. It is the foundation on which many couple relationships are built and gay people are as likely to experience it as anyone else. After one or two meetings people will be talking about themselves as an affair or couple and the relationship is likely to be very intense. Feelings are powerful, expectations are high and the strain on both people is great. Some relationships may become long-lasting and mutually supportive but often they are destroyed by the weight of their own expectations and the search begins once again.

Romantic love can be very real, it is not a mere fantasy. The frequency with which these romantic feelings occur arises out of its ideological strength and the way relationships are defined in our society. Given that our sexual and emotional needs as gay men are so repressed and hidden it is hardly surprising that they become distorted and that we behave in a frenetic way when there seems any possibility of these needs being met.

Many gay men believe that if we set up one to one relationships modelled on bourgeois, heterosexual assumptions about monogamy, emotions and romance, we will succeed. Our needs and desires will be satisfied and we will be content. The fact that so often we fail is seen as a personal failure or a gay failure. Experiences of relationships rarely measure up to our expectations because of the distortions created by a capitalist patriarchal society of all relationships and the very formation of the expectations themselves. Relationships become deformed by feelings of jealousy, possession, competitiveness, insecurity and inadequacy which are not individual failings but are bound up within the whole socio-sexual structure.

On Myths And Maleness

How do we as gay socialist men deal with love, sex and maleness in a society which has so many built-in preconceptions of our gender roles and sexuality? The three major areas of relationships – with friends, with lovers and with women all pose different aspects of the same problem. As well as looking at relationships, we must, as men, continually question our attitudes, assumptions and expressions of our maleness. We need consciously to avoid using it either in group situations or in our day to day or personal relationships.

The question of relationships with lovers and with friends is one of the major problems we must confront although there is a limit to what small groups or individuals can achieve, for we cannot isolate ourselves. In this period of sexual flux, we have greater freedom to choose our sexual lives, but in the absence of received and acceptable guidelines the state of flux can lead to insecurity, a new form of isolation, uncharted problems. In this situation new prescriptions can be as imprisoning as the old mores. Earlier we stressed the importance of what are usually described as casual affairs *because* they are so demeaned. We need to counterbalance the strong ideological pull (common even in the gay world) which asserts that only long lasting relationships can validate homosexual love. But none of us deny or demean the needs of individuals to build up relationships of whatever types they find fulfilling and conducive to their individual needs. Nor are we unaware of the dangers of exclusivity.

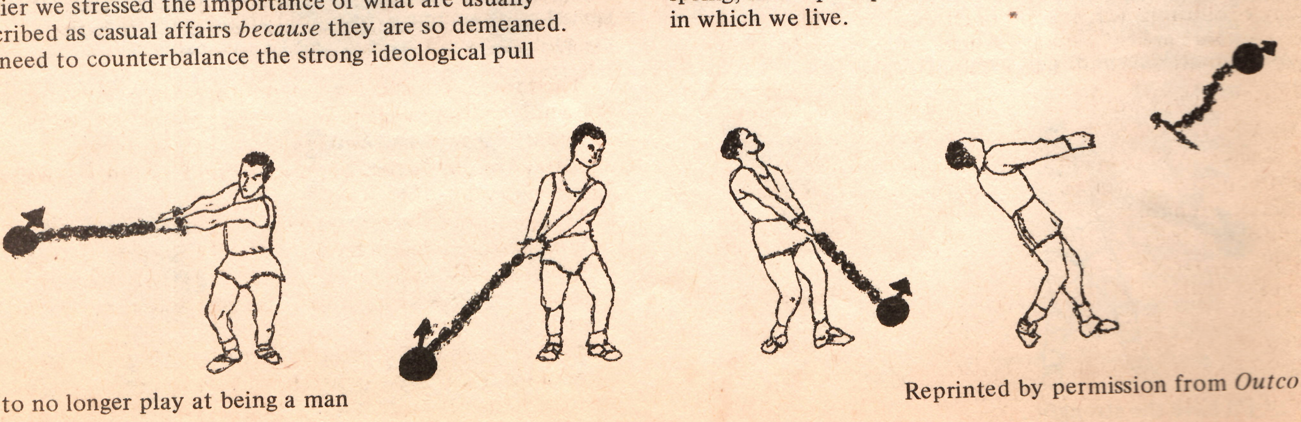
Out of the women's movement and the gay liberation movement have come some of the ideas which have guided and no doubt will continue to guide us in confronting our uncertainties. The most important of these is our awareness of sexism.

A recognition of the concept has not, of course, prevented its continued existence, even among gay liberationist men. We have been socialised as men and often display a form of sexism where it is important to assert our masculinity in relationship to women as well as to gay men. One of the prime aspects of the oppression of women is their portrayal as a 'feminine' sex object ready to fall at the feet of any man. Men express their masculinity in terms of domination and initiative over women and many women feel that gay men can oppress women by this same open expression of masculinity even when it is directed towards other men. We have, too, the social advantage that all men have by the very fact of being men, whatever our sexuality. Our position towards women at work and socially is often the same as that of heterosexual men. We learn quickly to be forceful and dominant.

Sexism must be confronted in all our relationships as well as in our political activity, in comradeship with socialist feminist women. We cannot culturally de-man ourselves; nor should we deny the validity of our own love for our own sex; but we can reject the rigid stereotypes that imprison us as men and distort our attitudes towards both women and men.

Building up a gay subculture in which we can construct a gay identity free of rigid stereotyping, in which we can relate to other gays without, for example, the overriding limits of the commercial gay scene or the formality of a CHE group is an important step. Interest groups, gay caucuses in unions, gay centres and so on are positive moves in this direction.

In the end we come back to the problematic relationship suggested by our title: love, sex and maleness. Having rejected utopia now, new prescriptions and an unlikely demanning, there are only short term perspectives. A commitment, firstly, to a continuing exploration, in a scientific manner, of the material roots of maleness and, secondly, to building our own lives and all our relationships on a basis of trust, openness, flexibility and respect for human sensibilities and feelings. If love and sex are problematic notions to describe and write about, they are even more difficult relationships to live. But whatever their final meaning, we feel committed to exploring them; in theory, but above all in the way we live our lives. The use of terms like exploring, building trust, suggest the basis of what we can do. That must be, ultimately, to participate in an *ideological* offensive which not only questions traditional bourgeois notions of sex, love and gender, but also their bastard offspring, in the post-permissive and would-be liberated society in which we live.



to no longer play at being a man

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Come All You Gay Women, Come All You Gay Men

by Jeffrey Weeks

"Come all you gay women,
Come all you gay men,
Come Together,
Stand together,
And each other's rights defend."

The rallying call to solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood, comradeship, has been a vital unifying force in the gay liberation movement. If the early GLF left a quantifiable legacy it was in the twin themes of coming out, and coming together. "We speak for ourselves," as Jack Babuscio's book proclaims, the collective open-ness is the source of our collective strength. And this collectivity, as the whole ideology of gay liberation has proclaimed, is across and not along gender lines. Gay women and gay men must stand together, not only to defend their rights (a spurious notion, anyway, as we have precious few 'rights') but to fight a common enemy in sexism. Sexism, the stereotyped assumptions about an individual's gender-based social and sexual behaviour that bourgeois society structures, reinforces and perpetuates (though always in ever changing, alluringly clad, guises) is at the heart of the oppression of female and male homosexuality, and the source of the glorification of heterosexual norms.

But the rally call to solidarity is always posed as an ought; it is a categoric imperative, not an empirical reality. Gay men and gay women rarely stand together, and even along the fractures of the gender divide there is precious little male or female solidarity. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley in their editorial introduction to *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* imply that in the women's movement the rhetorical evocation of 'sisterhood' has exhausted its historic role. Its

> "implications were not thought out and it seems to us now to mark both an absence of any real unity beneath it and to ignore the highly problematic relationships that in itself it implies."

Such a casual dismissal of what many women have gained from the movement has produced a whirlwind of criticism; quite rightly, in many ways. But I am left with an uneasy feeling, as a male outsider, that there might be an element of truth in it, because I can sense a similar unease in my attitude to the gay movement. When one of its institutions such as *Gay News* is attacked, my consciousness of the need for common endeavour is enhanced. But when I read other gay papers, or hear of yet another gay Giro group my heart sinks into a grey twilight; another world, another people.

Solidarity, in other words, is not something to be proclaimed; it is something that has to be struggled for. It is a vital ingredient for our success, but it can also be the source of illusions which can hinder our cause, becoming, if we are not careful, a mirage whose pursuit can be at the expense of any real and lasting achievement.

Specifically, I want to offer two personal judgements; firstly that the call to solidarity, especially between men and women in the gay movement (which I regard as essential in the struggle against sexism, and a potential source of strength and growth for both men and women) has not been based on any real consideration of the basic, and often different needs of gay women and men. And secondly, that our willingness to embrace an ideology of solidarity has prevented us from actually working out a means of achieving it. And to be even more specific, I believe the existing organisations of the (predominantly male) gay world are a positive hindrance to its achievement.

Two Worlds

Gay men and women have worked together throughout the history of the homosexual movement. Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, the most famous lesbians of the inter-war period, were in close touch with the (mainly homosexual) sex reformers of the 1920s and 1930s; and during the 1950s and 1960s lesbians like Charlotte Wolff gave their support to the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Albany Trust, whose main constituency was bound to be male. Indeed, the Campaign of the HLRS and law change of the 1960s probably gave as much stimulus to lesbian self organisation as to male homosexuals. Lesbian groups such as the Minorities Research Group, Arena Three, and Kenric, developed in the 1960s partly out of the new atmosphere created by the post-Wolfenden reform activities. Similarly, in the early days of GLF, gay women worked with gay men, though the women were invariably in a minority of perhaps 1 to 5. A similar alliance can be seen today in CHE.

But there were always acute tensions. When the women walked out of the London GLF in 1972 to set up an autonomous organisation, they gave three reasons: the drain on their energy caused by the endless fight against the men's sexism; the unradical nature of GLF politics generally; and the need to provide a "viable alternative to the exploitative 'straight' gay ghetto". These reasons encapsulate the whole problem, and pinpoint the real difficulties of collaboration. The male gay organisations have been essentially *instrumental* in political thrust; the HLRS of the 1960s was designed to change the law; the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, despite the proliferation of other aims, intends to do the same. Most of the lesbian organisations on the other hand have been primarily explicitly *social.* Kenric was founded in the 1960s specifically because a group of lesbians were dissatisfied with the abandonment by the Minorities Research Group of its social meetings. And Sappho, the largest lesbian organisation today, is primarily social in its impact, the magazine of that name being chiefly a grassroots contact keeper rather than a vehicle of political propaganda.

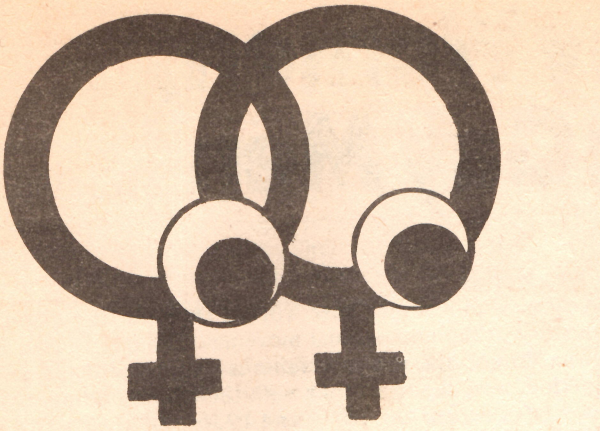
Boy meets Boy . . .

There is an obvious and central reason for the difficulty in forming a united gay movement. Gay men essentially want to meet other gay men, gay women other gay women. This is not a simple chauvinism but a basic problem. Gay people, by definition, need emotional and sexual contact with their own sex. This does not mean, as the old theory that homosexual men are basically misogynists would suggest, that cross-gender relationships are difficult or impossible, but it does mean that they cannot carry the same emotional current.

The reasons for this are not simply sexual. Beyond it is the whole cultural weight and baggage which defines us differently as men and women. The authors of the important book, *Sexual Conduct,* John Gagnon and William Simon remind us that

> "the patterns of overt sexual behaviour on the part of homosexual females tend to resemble closely those of heterosexual females and to differ radically from the sexual patterns of both heterosexual and homosexual males".

This is not surprising given the massive socialisation process we all undergo. Our sexuality revolves around our gender identity. But it is more than just an individual socialisation



which affects overt social and sexual behaviour. There is also the central problem of the different social positions of men and women in a patriarchal society. It is no accident that the male homosexual identity developed earlier than the lesbian, nor that the male gay subculture is massive and varied compared to the female. Male homosexuals in their sexual and social characteristics express traditional male characteristics. The phenomenon of male cruising is after all a direct parallel of the traditional and ideologically approved form of the male taking the sexual initiative. The middle class males yearning for liaisons with working class youths (J A Symonds, the Uranian poets of the turn of the century, E M Forster, J R Ackerely, Christopher Isherwood) is a resounding echo of the 19th century male reality of easy sexual contact with working class girls (often servants).

This means that the social needs of male and female homosexuals are different. Where a male gay liberationist sounds against the commercial gay world and yearns for a better community it is a political protest *against* an existing reality. When a gay woman talks of building a community, she is talking basically of building from scratch (except for isolated outposts of commercialism such as *The Gateways* in London). The struggle of lesbians for an autonomous identity is that much harder because they are brought up as women in a male-dominated society. Not only the ideology of sex, but the material reality of most women's lives still perpetuates a subordinate position for most women, and the effort needed to break away can be searing (even as compared to men, hard enough as their struggle for identity can be). When Charlotte Wolff was examining the lesbian organisations in the late 1960s she noted the high degree of discretion:

> "Almost all of them spoke to me of their terror of being recognised as lesbians and of the subterfuges they had to make in order to hide the fact."

This reflected the real, felt absence, of a viable, socially accepted or recognised identity. That the situation has changed at all is largely a result of the gay liberation and women's movement, especially of the latter. For a general movement to challenge the subordinate social position of women inevitably brings to the fore questions of sexuality, and not surprisingly many lesbians find that they can work most easily in the women's movement rather than in the gay movement. Working in the women's movement does not remove the problem; lesbians still feel the necessity to organise autonomously around their specific areas of concern. But the women's movement provides an arena, and a political dynamic, which potentially unites the social and the sexual, the material and the ideological. The gay movement itself has failed to do this.

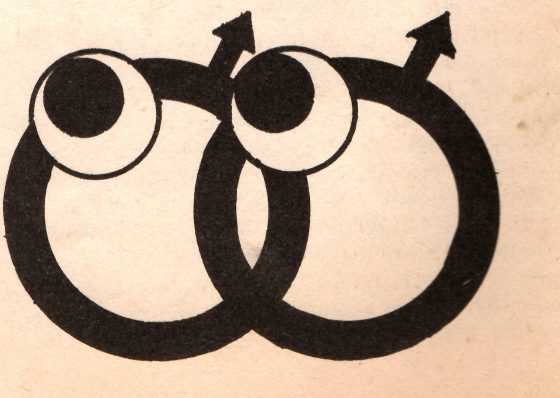
Contradictions

The truth is that lesbians and gay men have found it very difficult to work together continuously in gay organisations. This was true of GLF and it is true of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. CHE has two constant strands, evident since its foundation in 1969; first, to take up the banner of law reform; second, to expound the social facilities of gay people (crystallised in the scheme for Esquire Clubs in the early 1970s). Neither (given the male dominance in the social bias of CHE) had much to offer women. Many women, indeed, felt deeply alienated in CHE; that they stayed at all is an index of the absence of any lesbian alternative rather than of positive feeling. *Sappho* called the 1975 Sheffield Conference "an example of the oppression of lesbians within the gay movement". There was no creche, no organisational provision for a women's caucus, little interest in women's motions. After the Malvern and Sheffield annual conferences in 1974 and 1975, where anti-sexist talk was much to the fore, there was a token integration of women into the top structures of CHE. Five women sat on the EC, 1975–6. But by 1977 only one remained: the rest had left, through alienation, boredom, exhaustion, or political disagreement. Beyond this was the question which was rarely posed, let alone confronted by CHE: of what, in the short term, the men and women had in common in a single organisation like the campaign. If CHE aimed to be an umbrella organisation, then there was obvious room for a variety of groups, male and female, social and political, cultural and activist, beneath its generous shade. But if it was a unitary organisation, as it claimed to be, then it had to forge aims that united and involved its membership. CHE attempted this – with its sex education campaign (a bureaucratic disaster), its youth activities, its (usually late and ineffective) support of particular cases, its slowly developing trade union work. All of these were essential, but by their nature they were low key and specialist campaigns, and not often very successfully executed. CHE was becoming a way of life for many of its leaders, a round of essential meetings, key committees, vital minorities, efficient paper chases – and no political zap.

The only campaign that promised to arouse national attention was over law reform: and that was of little direct interest to women. At the 1976 annual conference in Southampton out of some 700 people present, under 50 were women. The barriers to the integration of women in CHE remained enormous.

New Starts

It seems to me that we have to start with the gay world as it is, and not as it ought to be. That implies, firstly, building on the diveristy of the gay movement by encouraging its inherent creativity. We should support groups, whether they be all women, mixed, or all men, in pursuing their specific interests and concerns, as long as they are inherently committed to the basic anti-sexist attitudes of gay liberation. I fail to see what is inherently sexist in a group of men working together on a topic of specific concern to themselves (say cottaging, male sexuality) and I believe it to be wrong for creative possibilities to be stamped on because they do not conform to abstract slogans. Secondly, though, it is possible to maximise the areas where men and women can work together: in befriending activities, in political discussions, in trade union campaigns, in socialist gay groups, in functional or professional groups. The important task is to work out forms for activity which conform to the precise needs of that activity.



Thirdly, all this pinpoints the sheer inadequacy of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality as an organisation: a massive apparatus of paper and committees erected on an apolitical base. What is needed is an organisation which can fulfil the useful functions of CHE: linking a series of local groups which can satisfy a lot of specifically social needs, with a number of special campaigns in a national organisation, without an overweighted structure. This could be done best, I believe, in an organisation which is specifically a *federation* of campaigns and groups rather than a unitary organisation. The national organisation would coordinate and publicise a series of task forces: on the law, on lesbianism, social facilities, employment, befriending, etc., but the essential initiative, the basic dynamic would flow from these campaigns themselves. The grassroots would have an opportunity to grow, while the centre would be energised.

Fourthly, as a step towards this, a national convention should be called to establish an organisation to replace CHE. Its organisation would be the last act – a generous act of hari-kiri – by CHE. The new movement growing on its embers would be explicitly anti-sexist; would invite the affiliation of women's groups, and of anti-sexist groups on the socialist left. But its prime function would be to provide a focus for unity in thought and defence in a gay movement based on a creative diversity.

The gay movement would then have a two tier structure best adjusted to its present potentialities; a creative, radical, flexible, grassroots movement, and a national outlet which could concentrate on the issues which unite rather than divide. The result would not be a panacea. But it might ensure a more secure unity, based on differentiation and specialisation in the first place, but working towards a more secure sense of solidarity ultimately. Only in this way shall we really be able to "stand together and each other's rights defend".

Communists Comment

In Autumn of 1976 the Communist Party of Great Britain produced an important statement on the oppression of homosexuals following a decision of their annual conference. Nigel Young of Gay Left interviews Sarah Benton and Bea Campbell, both members of the CPGB on some of the major related questions confronting the CP today. The views expressed are, of course, the personal views of the two women and not necessarily official party policy.

How did the Statement arise and what were the processes involved in the Party which led to the formulation and production of the Statement?

Bea: At the last Party Congress in the autumn of 1975, there were several gay resolutions from branches up and down the country and there were several attempts to get these included in the main resolutions. The executive of the Communist Party knew of the existence of the gay movement and that's as far as it went. In fact, it was the first attempt by gays in the Party, at that level, to commit the Party to a positive position on homosexuality. There was a real problem because it had never been aired – it had never been discussed, and communists were bound to have fairly predictable sorts of attitudes, just like the left has got its predictable attitudes to women unless feminism confronts it.

So there was this very formal reference to homosexuality in the main resolution which completely dissatisfied the gays who were there, who, in fact, were the only people who voted against the main resolution. The resolutions were not rejected but there was an acknowledgment that it wouldn't have made any sense to say 'Oh, yes, we'll support homosexuals', never having discussed the subject. So those resolutions were referred back to the new executive which was going to have discussions and try to work something out. The Party's national organiser worked together with a group of gays in the Party to prepare a possible policy statement.

Sarah: There was also a general sense among gays that being a gay in the CP would involve some people having political rationalisations for an anti-gay attitude that there wouldn't be anywhere else. It was, therefore, imperative for gays to be enabled to come out in the Party as well as the Party having an appropriate stance for a revolutionary organisation.

Will the Statement be discussed widely in the Party?

Bea: Yes because you now have the means for a big discussion in the Party. I heard, for example, that there were Party miners who read the statement and really thought they ought to talk about it and I thought that was great because that was the very root of the heavy men who one would imagine would be most defensive about stereotype masculinity, who would be very dismissive of homosexuality as an issue . . . that they actually moved to sort it out amongst themselves is very positive. It is a question of process . . . a process has been undertaken in the Party which is going to radically alter a lot of people's relationships, not just their attitude but their relationship to the issue of homosexuality.

The gay movement has existed in this country since the late 60s. Why has the gay question become an issue in the CP only over the last two years?

Sarah: One reason is that people realised that you can actually use the constitutional processes of the Party to get a policy through, and I think it was realised that you could actually get a policy on gays if you worked through the procedures, ie putting up the resolution and demand to be discussed.

Do you think the socialist feminist movement affected the consciousness of gay people in the CP?

Bea: The Party has demonstrated that it's prepared to argue fairly contentious things out and it has done that with feminism – there has been a kind of uproar, in some respects, for quite a long time and I think that was very constructive for all sorts of other people who felt they'd got a beef about something. Instead of assuming that the Party was monolithic, it did enable people to see that the organisation was open and perceptive about the possibilities of being changed.

Sarah: I also think that it's not just that gay people's political consciousness has changed as a result of their experiences of the gay movement which leads them to ask different questions about how you change things. It is also, because the times have changed, because 1976/1977 is the period of crisis, repression and depression, and for anyone to operate politically is more difficult. There's more fear and tension and conservatism around – that actually means that you have to think of different ways of being political. Had anybody in 1970 believed, and I'm not saying a lot of gay liberation people did, but had people in 1970 believed that small groups and spontaneity would effect a lot of changes, you certainly couldn't believe that in 1976 because of things being much tighter and much harder and demanding a different way of acting politically for it to be effective.

Why did the Statement emphasise law reform and not deal with the whole spectrum of sexuality?

Bea: There's no way that the statement could have been representative of what it was known would be broadly agreed in the Party if it would enter into arguments about the politics of sexuality. That has to happen but I think that can only happen by the issue being raised in a way that makes it accessible to the majority of the Party members and actually makes them then feel 'yes, they're responsible' for supporting a positive policy for homosexuality and affirming homosexual rights.

However the Statement did begin to talk about the politics of sexism . . . it tried to situate it in a sexual politics so it's not as if the only thing people got delivered were demands to change the law and give civil liberties . . . the point is the Statement is only the introduction to the argument; it's an entry into a whole new discussion about the nature of sexual politics.

Sarah: Given that the existing Statement is already very controversial then it wouldn't have helped us to have something that would have been totally incomprehensible for some of the members, who find it very difficult to get their minds around the possibility that one can question the naturalness and the rightness and the communist morality of heterosexual intercourse.

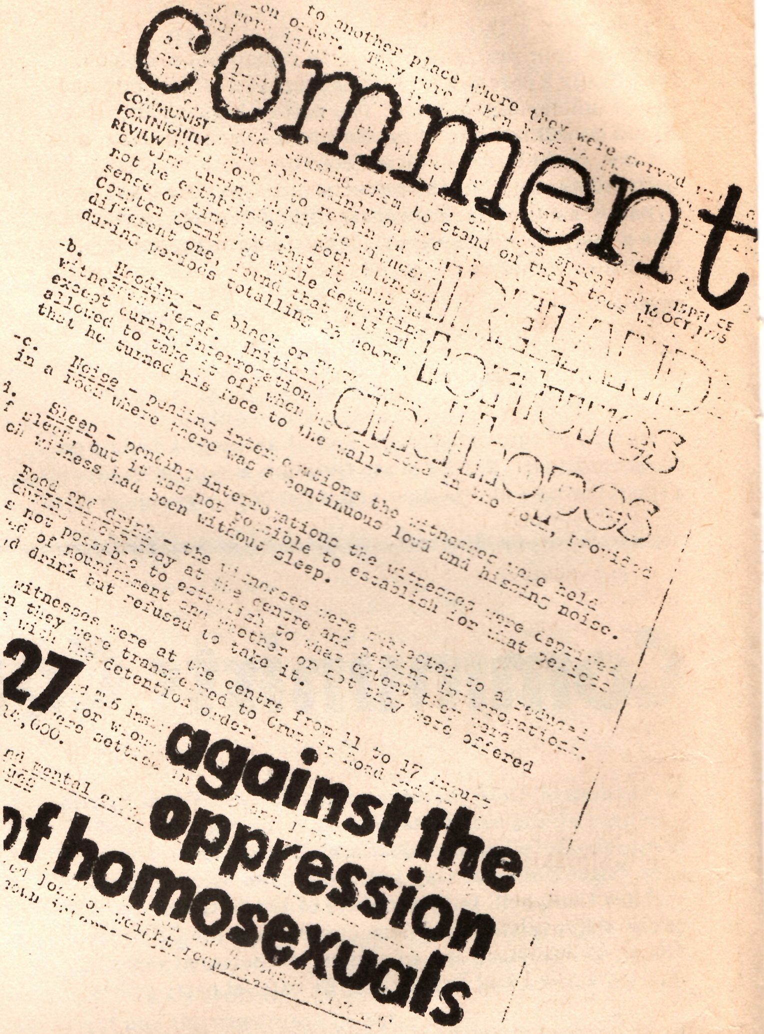
There's a certain puritanism which is very strong on the British left generally, which associates a strong family and straightforward sex with a man and wife, with communist morality. Bourgeois morality is seen as living in sin, promiscuity. Sexual athletics and bourgeois morality is not seen as good family structure . . . it isn't seen as a good solid working class unit.

How compatible is the Statement with the CP line on the family?

Bea: Up until contemporary feminism hit the CP its attitude to the family was completely conventional. When feminism engaged in the Party, that immediately began to change. First of all the Party quite explicitly supported women's liberation. Some branches again agreed on national resolutions in the last London district congress last autumn. What was actually written was by no means a conventional attitude to the family . . . it was based on the assumption that the family is a political institution and serves political purposes. It's not a natural law of human organisation. It was seen as an institution which oppresses women and, furthermore, it's something which is open to political change.

I mean people are now being expected to change the way they live in the family, so, I think that the kind of conventional image of the cloth-capped Communist Party which believes in defending the family and defending bourgeois morality doesn't really stand up, given that the CP has really been affected to its marrow by the new sexual politics and has actually written that into its policy statements – that doesn't mean that it's not divided because it is.

Sarah: Strangely the question of the family has hardly been raised in discussion and it has actually been, to a greater extent, about sexuality as such and notions about what is natural about masculinity and femininity. The controversy has also been, while there is a crisis on, can we afford to indulge ourselves in this sort of area.



The Statement suggests the CP has made a move away from crude economism. How is this affecting the CP and what are the feelings of those members who are essentially economistic?

Bea: I think there's a ruling consciousness about what a revolutionary Party ought to be struggling over. At the same time, an anti-economistic position was saying that trade union demands ought to include more than wages and it's clear as you get set on that road, that your criticism of economism becomes much more comprehensive. We are now beginning to have a sense of just how comprehensive that criticism has got to be. We're not just saying there's a broader spectrum of demands that we can make and areas in which we can struggle, but we're also saying that the way in which we struggle, the whole issue of self-determination, the whole issue of how people are beginning to represent a socialist alternative within the context of a capitalist life, and all kinds of complicated arguments around the politics of control is extremely important too.

The point I'm trying to make is that, as that issue or as that sense of a commitment to anti-economism becomes more sophisticated, it becomes clear that our initial concept of it was fantastically limited, so what we feel our politics have got to represent is only tentatively understood at the moment. What the shape of revolutionary politics would be, the revolutionary movement would be, is still only very tentatively understood. So, certainly a gay politic could be situated as part of an anti-economistic tendency.

Well, that was part of the question, the other part was to do with the membership of the CP . . .

Bea: I think it has to be understood historically that the Party's come out of a period of feeling completely besieged and in my view, out of a period where it was politically often very impoverished and certainly theoretically impoverished. Now the Party is being renewed in a way that won't just guarantee its survival but will actually change it and that involves all sorts of battles.

There are those who believe that what you do if you are a revolutionary, is you make demands of the state and you make demands of an employer and that one day those demands will become so intolerable and your mass support will be so substantial that the kind of machinery that exists will be shoved into ruin and from there we take over, right. At the same time there's a very different sense growing out of a different experience which has to do with, not the politics of cataclysm, as some people have put it, but in the way in which people have got to become different now, in order to struggle for soemthing which is something totally different. That represents an otherness in the quality of life, and that means that socialism isn't just more of the same but something which goes beyond economism.

But I still think that's a very tentative business and I think on the left it's quite interesting – there's all sorts of comings and goings on it – people whose politics were initially feminist, let's say, get confronted with the cuts and capitalists crises and lose confidence in their feminism and become unable to relate it to that kind of political spectrum. Consequently they will adopt a kind of crude economistic position in respect of those issues.

What does the Stalinist wing of the Party think of the Statement?

Bea: Firstly, you have to define what the Stalinist element is. In the main, it's a solidly working-class part of the Party which is called Stalinist because it's got a particular view of the Soviet Union. It also has a position that supports the Soviet invasion and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Now there are Stalinists in the Party who actually have realised a position which is very comprehensive criticism of where the leadership is going which is particularly vociferous about the Party's attempts to criticise anti-democratic aspects of life in the Socialist countries. They also have a much more comprehensive critique than that. Now that position isn't one that would necessarily be shared by the bulk of what would be called Stalinists in the Party, who are called Stalinists only by virtue of the fact that they think that the CIA was about to take over Czechoslovakia and it was therefore politically correct that the Russians moved in.

This last point is quite important because it means that the actual practice in struggle of a lot of people who would be called Stalinists in the Party isn't related to a general theoretical position which, by any stretch of the imagination, could really be called Stalinist. However, some of the really solid opposition to that statement has come from people who are Stalinists, and in the main, they're Stalinists who've got a very comprehensive Stalinist position, and who are theoretically and definitely self-confessed Stalinists.

Your definition of a Stalinist seems to me quite narrow. Wouldn't Stalinists give support to Russian development from the late 20's to the present day which would make them anti the Statement and opposed to people who supported the Statement.

Sarah: I think Bea's definition is actually a very broad one. There can be very few people in the Party who would say that the methods that were used under Stalin were actually the best that could obtain during that period. I mean, no person is going to say that Stalin was wonderful. But what committed Stalinists would say was that given a situation, there was no alternative to what Stalin did, and the number of people who would say that straightforwardly is very small in the Party.

I think the definition Bea was using was actually larger and I think it's about a certain working-class tradition which sees as the ideal of socialism, the absence of unemployment, the provision of cheap housing, the provision of social services, the provision of free medical care, the end of certain sorts of discrimination, hostility to American imperialism and in their terms an accessible popular culture. In these terms they think that's what's going on in the Soviet Union. That makes other issues like intellectual freedom to them seem less important because one particular notion of socialism has not only been partially achieved but has got to be defended. In that sense, that was a very broad way in which we were talking about a certain pro-Soviet Union position.

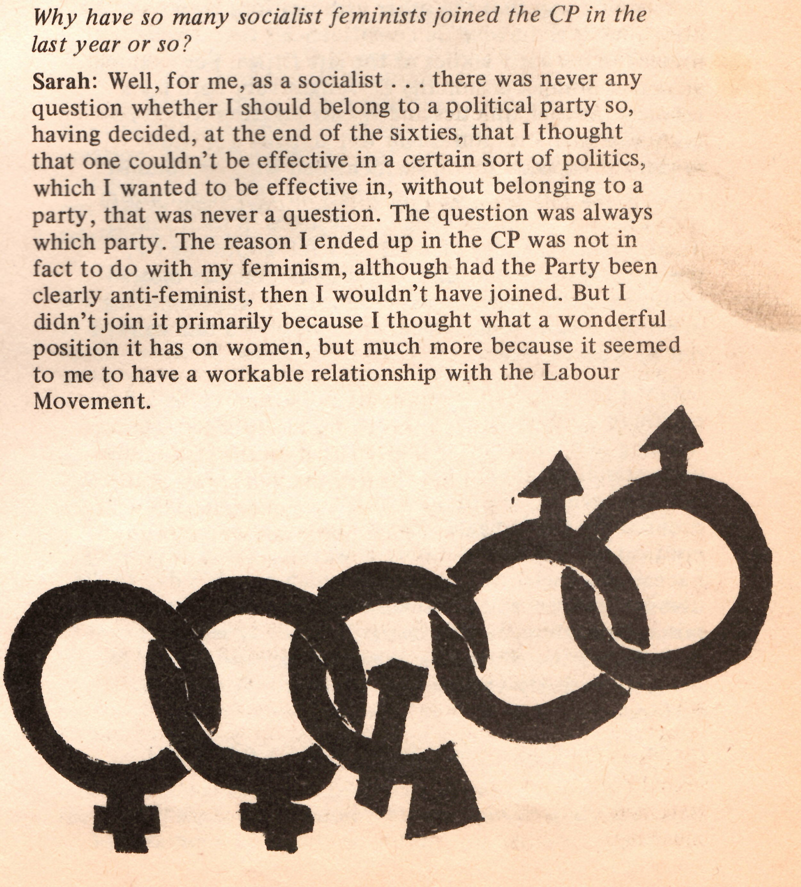
There's also a very strong feeling in the Party because of the fifties that you can be critical of the Soviet Union but not in public because you don't give the bourgeois enemy a chance to knock it over the head.

I think there are also those people who wouldn't necessarily say that Stalin was particularly nice, indeed in private they might think he was rather awful, they're the people who want to say 'look, why are you discussing sex at the time when we've got too many unemployed'. They would therefore associate the discussion of sex with middle-class politics because we seem to be unconcerned with the material problems of life. We seem not to be worried about what it means to be unemployed or what it means to have cuts in social services.

In terms of the particular question and the position of Stalinists in the Party, I think that's very clear in terms of the Public Statements. Now you might think the Public Statements of the CP are still too much having to address themselves to a Stalinist opposition but the Stalinists are in opposition, that's the salient point there and they are in no way determining the position of the Party. I think that what's happened in the short time I've been in the Party is that feminist socialists and allies of feminist socialists in the Party, in terms of a particular political tendency, it's not just feminism, have grown much stronger because they are in tune with the political developments on the left in Britain in a way that Stalinists aren't or don't want to be because those politics are seen as 'bourgeois' by Stalinists.

Why have so many socialist feminists joined the CP in the last year or so?

Sarah: Well, for me, as a socialist . . . there was never any question whether I should belong to a political party so, having decided, at the end of the sixties, that I thought that one couldn't be effective in a certain sort of politics, which I wanted to be effective in, without belonging to a party, that was never a question. The question was always which party. The reason I ended up in the CP was not in fact to do with my feminism, although had the Party been clearly anti-feminist, then I wouldn't have joined. But I didn't join it primarily because I thought what a wonderful position it has on women, but much more because it seemed to me to have a workable relationship with the Labour Movement.



Why haven't these socialist feminists joined the Socialist Workers' Party or the International Marxist Group when they have well organised women's sections within their organisations?

Sarah: Most socialist feminists I know joined for a variety of reasons and I think that in itself is a reason. The Party is big enough to incorporate people who want to be engaged in a wide variety of activities, which I find, if you're in a smaller group, you're either an industrial militant or you're out there selling the newspaper. The CP I think is big enough in size and big enough in cultural dimension to allow people with a variety of particular interests to be active. This, and the lack of dogmatism within the Party means that it's possible for socialist feminists to join, given the pre-condition that the Party wasn't anti-feminist and given that we all knew a number of feminists in the Party.

Do you think then this does mean that there are less demands made upon individuals who join the CP? I mean, you can join the CP and in fact do very little conventional political work . . .

Bea: No, I used to think that that might be the case but now I think two things about the lack of dogmatism. One is that often people will receive that as just the CP being wishy-washy and without direction. What they don't see is that the CP is wide open for all sorts of changes. Now the ways that they're argued about is very tough, and it's not wishy-washy, and there are all sorts of levels of sophistication theoretically, but the fact is that those arguments do range within the Party.

There's another dimension to that which is that the Party does have a long history and there's a sense in which it's embedded in a working-class movement in a way that none of the other revolutionary organisations actually are, and, its composition is therefore quite explicitly and much more in that working-class movement. It's also got a growing constituency of intellectuals, a growing constituency of militant women . . . it's branching into other areas of politics. That means there are many areas and ways in which you can work in the CP.

I think the really important thing is that the CP is in the process of renewing itself, having gone through some really bad times. The Party is answerable for its own history in a way that the other organisations aren't. At the same time it is drawing on constituencies that weren't present in the early sixties or the late fifties. For example, groups of women within the CP fought very hard for a feminist position and won a feminist position which nobody else in the revolutionary left actually got. Consequently, socialist feminists identified with communist women in a way that, despite whatever anti-communism they felt, prompted all sorts of questions in their minds. Therefore irrespective of what they felt about the CP, there was no way that they could deny that our motivations vis-a-vis feminism was feminism. It wasn't moving in on the women's movement with an agreed line worked out by a lot of men.

Sarah: I think there is shared a growing sense which is beginning to develop of what the new political party working in a bourgeois democracy has got to be . . . and understanding that neither the mass Labour Party nor the old Bolshevik style Communist Party is actually really appropriate in the struggle against capitalism. It's got to be a political party which not only is working towards creating a sense of a socialism, but one in which people's day to day lives is a creative and personally enabling and consciousness raising procedure, so that being in the Party is actually something from which one personally gains strength. By being in the Party you are able to work in it and not be suffocated by it.

Is the CP being opportunistic by jumping on the gay bandwagon?

Bea: Ask yourself, does a miner in Durham . . . is there any lesson for him, any kudos for him to be a member of a Party that produces a statement on homosexuality, that half his workmates would think was pie-eyed . . . of course there isn't. Organisations don't do things like that – they don't commit themselves to unpopular, uncomfortable issues just because they think they're going to recruit a few people from gay liberation.

Sarah: I think you can use the term opportunist of an organisation that, if an organisation's political practice consisted of supporting the most prestigious campaign of the day, and that was all its politics consisted of, then I think you can say it's opportunistic, but I don't think you can otherwise. I think parties are often caught in a difficult position because if it doesn't support certain campaigns everyone says 'why are you so reactionary?' and if you do 'why are you so opportunistic and support it?'.

Is the CPGB a revolutionary or reformist party?

Bea: Well, the CP believes that capitalism has to be destroyed – it doesn't believe that we the people will experience liberation within capitalism – it wants to destroy the system – hopefully it will destroy the system or other people will destroy the system. In that sense of course it's revolutionary and in that sense, despite anybody's criticism about the alleged rampant sell-out by the CP or the creeping reformism of the CP, the fact is it's committed to that position so there is no way that I think it's legitimate to say that the Party isn't revolutionary. What's happened in Russia doesn't make the CP in Britain not a revolutionary party. What's happened in the conduct of all sorts of Labour Movement struggles, the defeats, the comings and goings doesn't make it an organisation that sells out the masses.

Sarah: I also think they're terms that actually mean comparatively little because I think the way that they're used is a technicist description which is describing the particular technique with which you think change is going to be effected, ie are you going to be prepared to take up arms and violence which tells you absolutely nothing about the sort of society you're going to have afterwards. I think, therefore, the argument about revolutionary or reformist, is people basically saying 'we're committed to this particular technique of change, this particular model of change'. What you have to do is evolve the model of change which is going to be most effective in terms of getting the sort of society you want with the sort of people you want in it, ie people who are able to take control over their lives and be creative, etc, and having a band of dedicated revolutionaries who can take over the state seems to me to say nothing.

Bea: There are some revolutionary parties and organisations who can't accept that the working-class have constructed forms which have long traditions and their sole practice in those organisations is to say 'they're wrong, this doesn't make sense, the structure's inappropriate, it's inherently bad'. In other words, those organisations can't actually understand historically why these forms have developed the way that they have, what uses they serve, what their limits are and what their uses are. In a sense they're misunderstanding of something which is fundamental about how the people struggle, learn, and why people create the particular organisational forms that they do.

Now, I think that's both a strength and a weakness in the CP's relationship to working-class organisations and I think that the CP understands it, empathises with it, more than anybody else on the left . . . it's of the working-class in a way that the rest of the left actually isn't. Too often it's been determined by those structures and the ideologies that prevail in that it has not been able to distance itself, at times, from what the limits of those institutions and forms are. But then, given that acknowledgment, there's a movement by the CP itself which is criticising itself for that failure, and it's beginning to re-assess what the limits of traditional organisations have been.

What is the CP's attitude towards sexual repression in Russia and Cuba?

РАБОТНИЦЫ и КРЕСТЬЯНКИ
ВСЕ НА ВЫБОРЫ
Под красный стяг,
в ряды с мужчиной! -
буржуазии страх несем!

Sarah: It disagrees with it. It's interesting that whenever feminists visit socialist countries they always ask about sexual repression. Apparently we're getting a bit of a reputation for always asking them about sex. But, interestingly, I've heard three of the senior men in the Party who've been to Cuba, all of whom have on their own asked about homosexuality, ie they've felt concerned enough to ask. I think they were told, 'no, gays are not put into concentration camps, they don't have their balls cut off, but yes, homosexuality is unnatural'.

In what areas is the CPGB critical of Russia?

Sarah: I think the problem here is when and why a British CP ever pass comment on another CP policy because you have to say why does it pass comment at all. You can't go around the world saying 'I think your CP is wrong because it's not as good as ours'.

The reason why the British CP has come out with very direct statements about the lack of civil liberties for certain people has been when it's become a news issue, and in Czechoslovakia it's been even more direct about that. Now if there were a news issue of a homosexual person being known to be oppressed then the CP would have a reason and a duty to say something about it, but I think you can't unless there is a reason for passing public judgment.

I mean, at what point in time do you publish on the front page of your newspaper a public criticism of another CP. When it comes up and you have a policy on it you do, but you don't put a statement on the front page of the Morning Star saying the Soviet Union represses homosexuals and we condemn them.

Bea: But it's worth saying that when and if the British movement on homosexuals actually says 'look, we've got case histories of', and that includes people in the CP – when they are able to say 'look, this person's actually been put in camp because he or she is a homosexual and we want to have a campaign about it', then there's an imperative for revolutionary organisations to engage in that. But that's never happened and I think an initiative like that could only come from contingents that really feel deeply offended by it, and in the case of homosexuality it's going to be homosexuals themselves.

Why do you feel the Statement is important and more than just a Statement?

Bea: I think it's important because it will change the life of homosexuals in the CP. It actually means that they're in a situation in which their right to be homosexual is affirmed by the Party. Now you might think that's not very important in terms of whether life as lived in Stockport in the CP is going to get transformed or not. But I bet that it qualitatively alters life in the CP for a lot of homosexuals and that's really important.

It's also very important that the Party takes such an unusual step. It doesn't go about constructing these policies all over the place on things it's never thought about before. It's important too because it's implicitly rejecting the argument that, when we've got capitalism in ruins and in a crisis whose got the right to talk about homosexuality. It's implicitly saying, just by the fact that it's made the Statement 'well, we do and there's an imperative'.

Sarah: It's also important, I think, because of the question about relationships between a movement and the Party. The gay movement will finally discover a political party making a statement about homosexuality which is more radical than a lot of gays are prepared to state. I think that brings into focus the question, what is a movement and what is a party. I think this means that certain gays will ask themselves questions about political parties which would have been completely irrelevant before. If all the political parties you knew were all anti-homosexual then the possibility of your involvement with a political party would have been absolutely nil unless you were going to be very secretive about it for it not to be important. Whereas I think now that question has been brought up as a valid one for discussion in the way that it wasn't a valid one before the Statement.

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Five And A Half

by Bob Cant

Coming out is probably the key unifying feature of the gay movement. Everyone—from gay Trotskyists to gay Conservatives—seems to be agreed on the point that all gays should break out of the closet and declare themselves. The last two issues of Gay Left have contained discussions of coming out experiences by two members of the collective. They wrote of the earlier oppression they suffered at home, at school, in the ghetto and so on and explained the factors which had led them to come out. But, of course, it doesn't end there. The fairy story ending ('As our eyes met across the crowded bar of the Boltons, we knew . . .') is as false as any other fairy story ending. For the society that we live in is still much as it was before—what was a revolutionary upheaval for the gay who came out is of little or no importance to most of the other 50 million people on this island.

Gayness is now talked about in intelligent ways but no major inroads have been made into society's assumptions of what is normal. We ourselves still struggle with these deeply rooted assumptions. Society still seldom allows gay parents to keep their children. Wearing a gay badge to work where it might offend customers and therefore cause the collapse of the pound is held by the law to be fair ground for dismissal. So how do we manage with the new more subtle form of oppression—'Some of my best friends are gay but the children/Arabs/appointment committee aren't so broadminded'—not forgetting 'I used to be bi myself but it freaked my girl out too much'—and then, of course, 'I met such a lovely gay couple from Milton Keynes at the local church and they've really got it together—perhaps you should meet them.' All of which makes my wrist about as limp as a steel girder.

I am a 32 year old teacher, a socialist, and not involved in a relationship. What I intend to do is discuss how I've handled the last five and a half years, some of my relationships and friendships, the problems of activity on the left and also the constant strain of feeling yourself a political message.

After New York

The thing that forced me into coming out was New York. I was visiting a gay friend in the summer of 1971 and found that I was taken for gay. Everyone I met regarded coming out as so obviously right that discretion or pretence would have been really stupid. None of them was particularly political in a traditional sense but their gay identity was something they were political about in a way I had never encountered before. I was only there a few weeks but when I returned to London I had no choice but to join the Gay Liberation Front. There I met all kinds of women and men engaged in a real debate about their liberation from sexual stereotyping and committed to activity towards that end. My personal problem disappeared and I saw that my sexual identity was oppressed by the society I lived in. With the support of this movement I began to feel I could make my own decisions.

I had long had vague socialist sympathies which took the form of campaigning for Labour at election times, wearing anti-apartheid badges and arguing in pubs. I had taught in Tanzania for two years and that made me understand the desperate poverty of the Third World and the meaning of imperialism. But all of this had been very inarticulate and disparate, the sexual politics of GLF helped bring it all together. Previously, my socialism had consisted of supporting someone else's activity and moaning helplessly when that came to nothing. Through GLF not only did I come to see that all oppression was one—that all oppression was part of the ideological support of the exploiting class, but I also began to understand the importance of self-emancipation. All the law reforms in the world would not free gays—or blacks or the working-class—until we began to free ourselves. No one else could come out for me. The only agency for the removal of any oppressive force had to be the oppressed people themselves. I later began to realise it was more complex than that but by coming out I had thrown off so much terror that self-emancipation then seemed the only thing that mattered. I was on the way to becoming a revolutionary socialist.

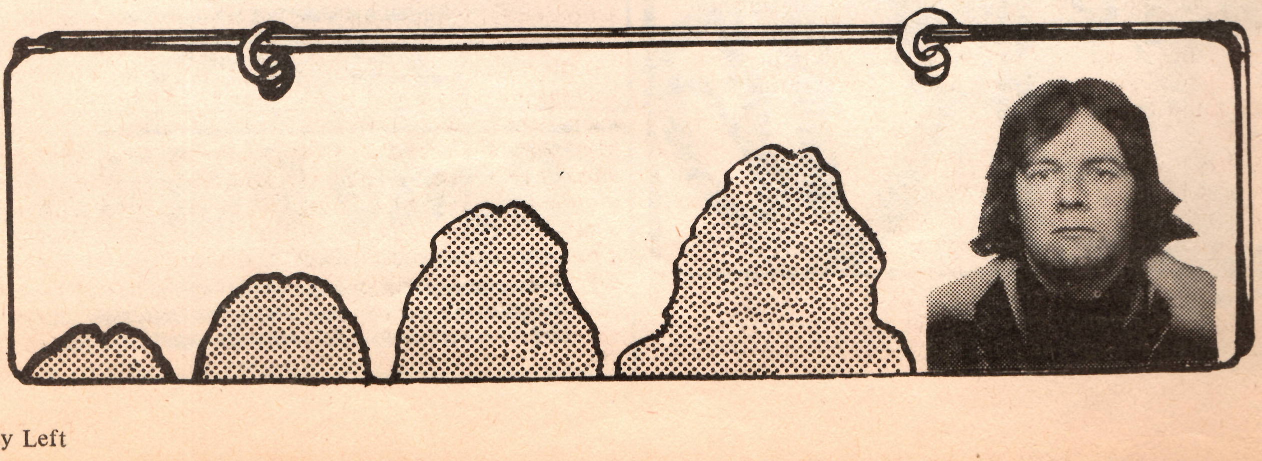
My life then had such unity it now seems unreal. The sexual, the emotional, the political aspects of my life all flowed together. I came out with all my friends and although although I lost a couple in the process it was hard for people to reject someone who was so happy even although they might have been a bit confused about sexual politics. A chronic illness I suffer from which is caused by anxiety vanished for these months. It was really all so wonderful that a cynic would have said it couldn't last. It didn't last.

One problem was that I had forgotten who I had been for the previous 26 years—I was a Scottish history graduate, brought up in an isolated, restrained atsmophere with the expectation that I would marry a woman I loved and have children. Such deeply rooted expectations were unlikely to disappear overnight. I had occasonal pangs of regret about the children I would never have but there seemed no problem about the lasting one-to-one relationship. Now it would be with a man instead of a woman.

But the whole ideology of GLF was against possessive relationships and although I could speak intensely no doubt about the need for free, growing relationships operating on many levels that was far from what I felt. When I began a relationship with the most beautiful man in the world after meeting him at GLF I thought I was in heaven. Everyone and everything else of importance to me was nearly abandoned. I would have gone to the other side of the world for him. It was the kind of relationship that most heterosexuals have when they're about 15. And there I was —27, with a whole set of adult experiences behind me—running through the long grass, so to speak. When it ended, after a month, I was desolate. I thought there was nothing left to live for—but I went back to the friends I had forgotten and soon even developed a warm lasting friendship with the man himself. So eager had I been for this total, all-embracing monogamous relationship that I had not seen the affair for what it was and I had put at risk both that relationship itself and many of my other friendships.

Grim Days

This confusion between new ideas and old assumptions con-



inued to take its toll and by the summer of 1972 I was eading for a crack-up just as London GLF was disintegrating. I think it would not be wrong to suggest that the reasons for these two processes were very similar. My own involvement with the movement was based very much on feelings—to be with other people who had also experienced all these years of hiding and lying and who were also experiencing a release from that was very exhilarating. To feel sure of one's own sexuality and to explore and develop it along with other like-minded people was a fantastic high. It was a high too for most people in GLF—but one with great dangers. The explosive nature of the movement meant that we were news-worthy material—and therefore it was quite easy to believe that whatever we did, because it was covered by the media, was important in itself. Style took over and content was often forgotten. It was much easier to say, 'Right on, man' than struggle with the implications of the new liberation.

Splits soon began to occur. Many gay women, with the experience of a much more developed women's movement behind them, felt that GLF was male-dominated and as oppressive to women as any group in society. There was a lot in what they said and when they left we were confused and unable, as a movement, to develop something from their criticisms. The attitude to gay Marxists is a fairly good example of the paralysis that had hit the movement. Marxist attempts to analyse gay oppression, and liberation were denounced as 'male'. No more needed to be said than that—the use of the new anti-sexist four letter word was enough. It was a denunciation that arose from guilt about women and it spread lethargy.

More and more people drifted back to the straight gay scene and most of us stagnated. People then appeared in our midst who regarded this stagnation as a virtue and warned about the dangers of going too far. We ducked the issue and the movement became a network of social groups. Coming out after 1972 was quite different from what it had been before. Instead of being part of a movement that helped you develop politically, you joined the group that you were interested in (Gay Fencers, Gay Bridge Players or whatever) and pursued your interest with new gay friends. There's nothing wrong in this but it now became less likely that any wider consciousness would develop—you came out as gay but nothing else changed.

I found myself at this time in a very difficult position—I was half a couple with only a handful of acquaintances. I found it difficult to make gay friends because there was too much sex in the air; and I found it difficult to make straight friends because they seemed oppressive. The man I lived with was a chubby, bearded South American upper middle class drop-out. We were together for about 18 months. We exercised our traditional male rights to be sexually promiscuous but otherwise we were faithful to each other. In fact, we had both broken very little from our male conditioning. Although we were fascinated by GLF ideas we still saw them as ideas rather than guides to live by. We both began more and more to go off on our own when it suited us but we became very jealous when the other one did so. We developed different interests too—he moved towards mysticism and I towards socialism. So we had different groups of friends which was another cause for jealousy. Had there still been a gay movement it might have been possible for us to work out another way of relating to each other. But in our isolation, we were afraid to do this—and the relationship froze. It was like a historic shrine that we bowed down to every night.

Better Days

Consecutive bouts of hepatitis were the kiss of death for the relationship and we parted in the spring of '73. I have never felt so low as I did at this time and had a fellow socialist at work not asked me to live at his house I could easily have jumped down the Victoria line. For two years I lived with three other adults and a child and it was here that I learned to trust people again. There didn't seem to be any need to prove myself—I felt accepted for who I was, depressed or not. And, through this acceptance I managed to work towards some kind of self-respect and thus towards the potential of loving others.

The child was particularly important inasmuch as he seemed to like me most of the time. I had hesitated to be friendly with children since I had come out because a bit of me was still afraid of being accused of being a child molester. I have never been sexually interested in children but the public image of gays as child molesters was so strong that I wanted to ensure beyond any doubt that it was not part of my image. So I had kept clear of children as much as I could. My relationship with this particular child made me see the absurdity of my position and I was soon able to relax with him and in turn with other people. He played a great part in helping me destroy my own self-oppressive image.

No-one else in the house, however, was gay and I was eager to make contact with other gay lefties. I had joined a Gay Marxist Group late in 1972 but it was never a very warm group. I stayed in it because there seemed to be nothing else. After about nine months another Trotskyist-type joined and I felt happier in the group. However, I have no doubt that my own Scottish reserve made it difficult for other people to approach me.

By the spring of 1974 things were definitely much better. I lived in a friendly house, I could now make relationships on a number of levels, I belonged and contributed to several different groups. My involvement in groups has been particularly important to my whole development. The GMG, IS, Gay Teachers Group and the Rank and File group of my union have all helped give me confidence to argue my case, intervene in politics generally and just live as a human being who is not totally paranoid.

These groups have also helped me to cope at work. The department I work in has a reputation for progressive education and liberal attitudes towards relationships. But gayness was not part of their world and for about two years it was an unmentionable topic to most people. This silence was very oppressive to me but looking back I can see that more of it was caused by ignorance than by hostility. People eventually began to ask questions and make friendly jokes about gayness. Then I felt secure enough to become, first, chairperson and now secretary of my union branch. The strains of being both the only out gay at work and one of the leading militants are potentially dangerous but have not proved unmanageable so far. But when I am low I feel isolated at work because I'm gay, and isolated in the gay movement because I'm a militant trade unionist.

Being a gay teacher is also difficult in the classroom situation. Gayness doesn't often come up but when it does I probably sound more like a liberal straight than a gay. I have come out with some students individually but coming out in a classroom situation is just another strain I have not yet felt able to take.

But these groups, however important they may be to me, are still tiny and only of significance to a small number of people. Despite recent statements by the CP and IS it is still the case that much of the left does not take sexism seriously. Many individuals on the left can pay lip-service, like all good hacks, to the need to struggle against sexism *but* they usually have a reason why they themselves don't become involved now. I would remind them of the following passage in Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?'.

'And inasmuch as this [the Tsarist] oppression affects the most diverse classes of society, inasmuch as it manifests itself in the most varied spheres of life and activity, industrial, civic, personal, family, religious, scientific, etc, etc, is it not evident that we shall not be fulfilling our task of developing the political consciousness of the workers if we do not undertake the organisation of the political exposure of the autocracy in all its aspects?'

The women's movement and the gay movement have begun to raise fundamental questions of sexism but there has been little response, as yet, from socialist straight men. I realise that many of them are actually terrified of having to explore their own sexuality with other men, but if they, as socialists, are interested in the creation of a new society then they must do this. Otherwise, it becomes much harder for any of us to escape from the roles we have been given by bourgeois ideology and so to work towards a new consciousness of gender and new un-oppressive ways of living together.

Couples, etc

Important as the gay movement has been for helping me to understand my position, to shake off many fears and to integrate my public politics with my personal politics it would be wrong to suggest that it has 'solved all my problems'. So-called personal problems are not like the measles—something that bothers you for a time but goes away. As children we all learned how to relate to other people. These learned patterns develop and are reinforced as we grow up—by our peers, by school, by advertising, by the media and so on. But we also shape these patterns to a certain extent ourselves—by our emotional needs, our sexual needs, our political will. One can be in a constant state of struggle trying to control one's own ways of relating as opposed to meeting the demands of conformity. This struggle is particularly likely in anyone who has been influenced by the women's and gay movements.

The struggle comes to the fore when I go anywhere in the gay ghetto. The atmosphere there is predatory—speaking to someone is the prelude to a pick-up. The whole scene is based on instant attractiveness and the ability to sell oneself. Failure to do so can leave one feeling totally dejected even although you can see through the whole thing. Success doesn't always lead to total joy either. There's nothing worse than being in bed with a pig of a man in Putney at 3.30. He wants you to go, you want to go but can't afford a taxi and don't intend to spend the night walking back to N. London. You lie there detesting each other, swearing you'll never do this again. He might actually be quite a nice person but because the gay scene defines people primarily as sexual objects that's the way you tend to relate to people you meet on it. Some people have told me that I have too many expectations about these experiences and that I should just see them as sexual encounters and no more. But although I can do this it seldom brings any kind of satisfaction because it seems to preclude the possibility of any other contact. Despite the expansion of the London gay scene in the last few years, I still prefer to meet my sexual partners in an atmosphere that is not that of a meat market.

All the men I have been involved with I have met through some part of the gay movement—GLF, Gay Teachers Group and so on. The fact that there was a common interest, as well as sexual interest helped me see the person in quite a different way. And if I have any choice, I prefer things to develop that way—for the sexual interest to grow along with everything else.

RED RAG

A MAGAZINE OF WOMENS LIBERATION
Red Rag: 22 Murray Mews, London NW1

No doubt this was partly why the two people I was most involved with recently were a woman and a straight man. Because of circumstances it was possible to develop relationships with both these people gradually and at our own pace. All three of us are committed Marxists of varying kinds, and we met in a milieu where there is less concern than usual about conventional relationships. What is attractive to me about both these people is the way in which they seem to combine what are traditionally called male and female qualities—they are both assertive and vulnerable. In both cases there was no obvious leader—we tried to mould the relationships on our own terms. There were no norms at all for us to follow, or so it seemed. But to think we could create these gender-free relationships in isolation was, of course, an illusion. The labels that we had as gay man, straight woman, straight man were too strong for us to break altogether. We had all adopted the roles that presumably suited us best in this society. To break out of them in a particular situation like this would have meant that we were, in fact, taking on new roles and thereby throwing ourselves adrift. So we do all remain good friends and feel a lot of warmth towards one another.

It is, in fact, nearly four years now since I had a sexual/emotional relationship with a man which lasted longer than about two months. There are general reasons one can give about the great strain on all gay relationships but, to a certain extent, that's avoiding the particular reasons that apply to me. I feel that I suffer from enormous and unreal expectations about most things—politics, relationships, my own abilities. I am usually disappointed—and, therefore, become highly defensive. This defensiveness can make me seem distant and sometimes frightening. My political commitments have not made things easy. It is very isolated to be a gay person in the traditional left. I found it particularly difficult in IS and my continued trade union activity also exhausts me and reduces the chances of meeting other gays. Even in one's social life on the straight left, when one is supposed to be more relaxed, the solitary gay still has to live out a political message. It's a big problem for all political gays (and it ought to be a problem worthy of consideration by all socialists) and the chances of making a relationship are few.

I think it is important to ask myself why I should still want a relationship with one other person, as I do. I no longer have expectations about fulfilling myself through someone else; I don't see life without a spouse as being in itself barren. However, none of us can manage on our own — we all need contact with other people and that contact enriches all our lives. And it is certainly the case that my living has been much more creative because of the emotional contact I have with friends. But these friendships stop short of long term sexual contact. I feel as if there is usually a divide between the people with whom I have sexual contact and those with whom I have emotional contact.

I am aware that searching for more integration can lead one into a couple situation but as things are I feel my life is fragmented and I am prepared to risk the threat of coupledom. These are the pressures that drive all too many heterosexuals into marriages and pseudo-marriages although they may have begun their relationships in experimental and non-exclusive ways. Stable emotional/sexual relationships would, hopefully, give my life a security it lacks at present. (I have no ideological objection to more than one such relationship at a time but the demands of work and politics make such plurality unlikely.) In addition such a stable relationship would enable us to have some interest in and respect for each other's past. That, in turn, creates more respect for the present and makes the relationship still more creative. But I must stress that I would not want under any circumstances such a relationship to be totally exclusive. Other contacts remain important for themselves. And exclusivity also leads to its own destruction – for no two people can ever meet all the other's needs indefinitely.

One aspect of my life to which I can see no solution relates to children. I spent over three years living in houses where there were children but now I find myself living alone. The contact with the children was very creative and I still enjoy seeing them. I'm not interested in having my own children because that implies a relationship with a woman which I now feel I can never have. But I would like to take part in bringing some children up. I don't mean just baby-sitting now and again, remembering birthdays and going to the zoo; I mean sharing real responsibility for children – being reliable about them, being bored by them, cleaning up their shit as well as all the fun. There are two main obstacles to this – one is the way in which houses are built so that it is difficult for a number of adults to live under the same roof with a number of children; the other is the ideology of the couple which makes many biological parents unwilling and unable to fully trust anyone outside the nuclear family unit.

This article doesn't really have an end. It would be false to work up to a theoretical definition and/or a rallying cry to the masses. In fact, it can't have an end unless the search and the struggle have ended. And they go on. All that I can really say is that although it is difficult to be out as gay, although the political strains are great, although emotional security is hard to come by, it is still infinitely more preferable to struggle with your own destiny than to remain in the closet. I remain, beyond any doubt, glad to be gay.

Lesbians aren't oppressed by the law...?

by Margaret Coulson

When Louise Boychuck was sacked for wearing a Lesbians Ignite *badge at work she appealed to an industrial tribunal against unfair dismissal. Her employer claimed that Louise was 'displaying a wording at our place of business which is distasteful to others and which could be injurious to our best interests if observed by clients, whose good will results in the earning of large amounts of overseas currencies beneficial to our country.' The tribunal supported the employers and Louise Boychuck lost her case and her job.*
(Spare Rib 54, January 1977)
(Gay News 110, January 1977)

A man brutally killed his wife and was sentenced to 30 months imprisonment for man(?)slaughter. On appeal he was released from gaol because, the judge said, he had been subjected to 'enormous provocation' – his wife had boasted to him about her relationship with another woman.
(Gay News 85, December 1975)

In the first case in which a lesbian has won custody of her children the appeal court judges condemned her 'obsessive involvement in herself and in the feminist cause' and made it clear that they were allowing her custody only because the children's father could not provide a home for them and the children would otherwise have been taken into local authority care.
(Guardian, 12th November 1976)
(Spare Rib 54, January 1977)

and the law doesn't oppress lesbians . . .

Well it's true that English law hasn't labelled lesbians as criminal. Lesbians weren't included in the 1885 criminal law amendment act because Queen Victoria's repressed sexual consciousness excluded the possibility of women loving women. And presumably masses of other women at the time shared that repressed view seeing their own sexuality only in terms of submission, male satisfaction and childbearing. Another attempt to add lesbians to the law condemning male homosexuality failed in 1921.

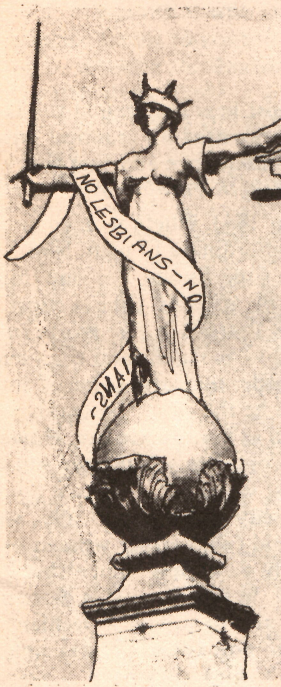
In a patriarchal society outlawing lesbianism as such has been generally unnecessary and even undesirable in the sense that it could give publicity to a possibility which, like Victoria, most women might never have allowed themselves to dream of.

In Nazi Germany, for example, the national socialists combined a vicious policy of persecution and extermination of male homosexuals with an almost total silence in relation to lesbians. To the Nazis 'What mattered was man, the warrior and begetter of children. In the blinkered view of these reactionary sexual theorists woman, being subordinate to man, could not decline her role as begetter of the species. Being equipped for motherhood by nature even a lesbian could and must bear children at the behest of her spouse. Lesbianism presented no practical reproductive problems of any consequence and that was what counted.' (H P Bleuch: *Strength Through Joy – Sex And Society In Nazi Germany*, p 284). Where women are economically and ideologically subordinate to men, laws criminalising lesbianism are superfluous. For one thing, it's always assumed, especially by 'experts' (like A Storr in *Sexual Deviation*, p 70 or R Pearsall in *The Worm In The Bud*, p 284) that the 'problem' is much rarer than male homosexuality. Phyllis Chessler indicates some of the reasons why this appears to be the case: 'Lesbianism has not been as legally punished as homosexuality. However it has been "punished" by being completely legislated out of the realm of possibility for most women . . . Women are more totally repressed, both sexually and economically, and are therefore more sexually timid (with either women or men) as well as more economically powerless than either homosexual or heterosexual men. In one sense it is more difficult for women to become and to survive as lesbians than it is for men to survive as homosexuals. For example, men either don't need – or don't think they need – women for economic survival. Most women need and think they need men in order to survive economically as well as psychologically.' (*Women And Madness*, p 187)

Economic inequalities between men and women help to sustain this repression. Just to take the most obvious economic factor of earning power: women's average earnings were still not much more than half of men's average earnings in 1976. Complete personal independence from men and an *average* standard of living are virtually incompatible for most women in this society at the present time and especially for those who have children to support. Besides the social/psychological barriers to independence are still enormous. Dominant social definitions and self images of women are still of women in (subordinate) relation to men – daughters, wives, mothers, sex objects. (For example, most people see the title Ms not as a replacement for Miss and Mrs but as a euphemism to cover the embarrassment of unmarried or no longer married women).

John Berger discusses one aspect of this: 'The social presence of women is different in kind from that of a man . . . *Men are* and *women appear.* Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female.' (*Ways of Seeing*). A man unrelated to a woman is still a man but what is a woman without reference to a man: as Phyllis Chessler has said the possibility of avoiding or breaking out of the conditioning which produces 'women's social presence' is 'legislated out' for most women.

And we should not delude ourselves that the ideas behind the Nazi's silence about lesbianism are not alive in our society now. The dominant stereotype of male sexuality which is proclaimed and institutionalised stresses the active, aggressive and once roused uncontrollable character of man's sexual 'urges'. Woman as the sexual complement to man is stereotyped as the passive or responsive dependent partner, available to be used or aroused but not to initiate, and not to say no. According to this view a woman without a man might as well be asexual. Rape is one logical conclusion of this particular polarisation of male and female sexuality and the concept of monogamous marriage in which rape is impossible because the wife must always be sexually available to her husband is another. The message in either case is that women, whatever their stated desires or preferences can be taken sexually by men illegally in rape, legally in marriage. (Challenging these stereotypes is always seen as damaging, especially to men; thus recently psychiatrists have been very ready to blame 'aggressive' women's liberationists for sexual impotence in men.)



These ideas about women's sexual vulnerability and dependency combined with the holy trinity of marriage, monogamy, maternity as the source of status and fulfilment for women in society have made it difficult for lesbians to identify themselves with pride either to themselves or to others. Before the re-emergence of the current women's movement and gay movement lesbians could see themselves as 'unfeminine' beings trapped in female bodies (like Radcliffe Hall's noble Stephen Gordon in *The Well Of Loneliness*) or as women who couldn't make it through to full heterosexual feminine 'maturity' or as odd unexplained exceptions to some feminine rule. Those of us who have come out within the orbit of the women's and gay movements or who have been able to re-define ourselves with their support may be able, usually, to assert that and feel that that has some truth for us. But that degree of male irrelevance and female autonomy is still a long way from most women and from most lesbians amongst them even now. Lesbians are still being oppressed, almost to invisibility, even when they are not directly being attacked by the law. Nevertheless, lesbians *are* oppressed by the law.

The examples quoted at the beginning of this article show some of the direct attacks which the law is making on lesbians as wives, mothers, workers. In addition the law oppresses us indirectly continuously and inevitably because it reflects and protects the relationships of the existing social order – those of a capitalist patriarchal society. Thus it defends profit, god, the queen and the family amongst others. For example, family law is committed to the maintenance of the heterosexual monogamous family unit as the basic unit within society. It thus proclaims the normality and necessity of heterosexuality, preserves the subordination of women and children within the family and helps to ensure that those outside it shall suffer poverty, loneliness, insecurity, social ostracisation (not only gay people, but single parents, the elderly etc). Laws on pornography and obscenity are used to define and re-define a repressive sexual morality. Laws limiting access to abortion help to maintain the 'moral' tie between sex and reproduction and deny women's rights to control their own fertility and sexuality.

Of course the law isn't oppressive by itself but because it serves the economic-political system and as such helps to keep us, more or less, in our oppressed places. Often we may not notice how the law is operating against us until we knock against the boundaries of its assumptions. Lesbian mothers fighting for the custody of their children discover that the 'welfare of the child' which is supposed to be the paramount consideration in deciding custody is defined not in terms of who will give the child the most love and support but in terms of where s/he will be provided with the most 'normal' environment.

And yet the idea that lesbians aren't oppressed by the law (because not defined as criminal) is widely accepted in the gay movement. This seems to derive in part at least, from the conservative view of law which reformist gay organisations have adopted and the simplistic criticisms which have been made of reformism from the left of the gay movement. In effect, CHE seems to accept the reactionary 'commonsense' view of law which runs roughly as follows: The law is a more or less neutral institution in society which protects the honest and upright majority from the criminal and corrupt minority – the national 'us' from muggers and murderers, from bombers and bank robbers, from shop lifters and sexual maniacs . . . Of course sometimes the law draws the line between the good 'us' and the bad 'them' in the wrong place. For example in the past it hasn't always been very fair to women or to immigrants especially black people . . . And the law still discriminated against homosexual men. But if we could shift the line between criminal and non-criminal so that homosexual men had parity with heterosexual men then the main barrier to homosexual equality would be removed.

Thus oppressive law is seen primarily in terms of the Sexual Offences Act and thus mainly seems to be relevant to men. Critics of reformism have tended not to challenge this very clearly. For example Don Milligan making the valid point that for the gay movement to centre its activity on law reform mistakenly implies that the law *causes* gay oppression, goes on to the amazing statement that 'gay women are not oppressed by any laws' (*Politics of Homosexuality*, p 11). Apart from telling us that reform of the Sexual Offences Act is not enough this criticism does nothing to illuminate the *connection* between law and the total system which oppresses us. CHE's reformism (though it *might* reflect the immediate interests of an elite of wealthy mysogynist male homosexuals) doesn't offer a sensible strategy even in relation to the law. Because it believes in the essential 'neutrality' of the law it can't even explain why new legal issues arise besides the central question of reform of the sexual offences act – support for the custody claims of homosexual parents, perhaps, or opposition to Mary Whitehouse's use of the Blasphemy Laws against *Gay News*.

We need to make more sense of the law than that. Our understanding of the law must recognise that the law often oppresses us through the institutions and assumptions which it defends as well as through the direct attacks which it makes on our sex and our sexuality. We need to examine the ways in which the law relates to the economic social and psychological constraints which confine women to 'their place' and be aware of the way in which that relationship shifts. As the women's movement develops and as it has questioned and confronted more aspects of the subordination of women to men, the assumption of female dependency, we find that the law is used both to tame and crush us. The Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act are both heralded as victories by a government which at the same time allows rising unemployment, inflation, cuts into social and educational and health services, all of which add to the insecurities and burdens of women as paid workers and housewives.

As the economic crisis grinds on the pressures against women's independence – from church and state, in defence of the family and traditional morality have grown clearer; the abortion lobby has become more powerful and a second anti-abortion bill is before parliament. As the women's movement has developed, as some lesbians have been more able to come out so criticism from judges, psychiatrists and other representatives of 'public order' have become more articulate. In the present situation the question of how to campaign on legal issues in the context of challenging our oppression as women and as lesbians is a crucial one. The more individual we get as feminists in campaigns such as those on abortion, rape, lesbians' rights to custody, battered women, equal pay, nurseries and many others, the more sensitive we have to become to the need to combine immediate help with long term aims, pressure for legal and administrative reform with the development of our own understanding and strength; we have to resist the pressures to play down less 'popular' causes (such as abortion, lesbian rights) in order to establish greater influence, and still trying to move outwards to reach more women. It all seems immensely complicated. But for women, and above all for lesbians, there isn't a simple path, there isn't a reformist option, in the struggle for our liberation. But that in itself won't protect us from the traps of reformism.

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Film Review

At last a film we can call our own?
SEBASTIANE
Directed by Derek Jarman

There's an ad. on the Tube showing a chicly dressed woman holding a Virginia Slim cigarette; the caption reads, "We've come a long way, baby, at last a cigarette we can call our own." The implicit message is that the women's movement existed only to gain women the freedom to consume another set of products; freedom is the power to exercise choice as a consumer of commodities. As with women so with gay men: our liberation is seen to consist in the power to consume our own products. *Sebastiane* is just such a commodity, on sale to the gay male public: if we are free to go to our own films, discos, pubs, etc., what more do we want?

But it is a measure of our continued exploitation and oppression that such a bad film as *Sebastiane* should receive adulatory reviews from the straight and gay press and should be a huge box office success at the Gate Cinema, and it is a measure too of the continuing ineffectiveness of the gay movement that Jarman's banal analysis of the connections between sexual repression, mysticism and violence should be applauded as courageous.

The film opens in Diocletian's court where decadence abounds in the shape of Lindsay Kemp and assorted exotically dressed actors, and our first sight of Sebastian is as he falls from favour for objecting to the death of a slave (because he has become a Christian). Already two pervasive faults of the movie are apparent: the Latin dialogue, translated in subtitles, is intensely distracting and intensely limiting in that it throws all the weight of meaning on to the visual images, and those images are far too weak to take it. Derivative from Fellili and gay porn they lack authentic sensuality and become high kitsch. The subsequent tale of Severus' unrequited passion for Sebastian, and of the latter's masochistic relationship to his god thus becomes an unfolding of cliche image after cliche image.

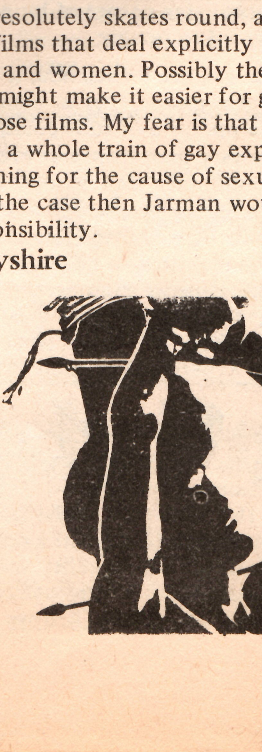
Sebastian showers, adored both by Severus and the camera; two lovers romp in slow motion in a rock pool; Severus' spleen is expressed by him stabbing an apple or petulantly smashing up his room, etc. Even the violence is prettified: Julian's mutilation becomes a parody of the Pieta, and Sebastian's murder is shot in slow motion with all the langorous fascination with death that Peckinpah has shown.

Throughout the film Jarman is hopelessly caught between trying to evoke a fantasy of stereotypically good-looking men in exotic surrounds to titilate his audience, and the attempting to give some intellectual body to his meditation on sex and violence. He succeeds in doing neither. We can neither wank successfully nor are we provoked by his disarmingly trite conclusion that sexual repression leads to violence. Yes, but how does repression lead to violence? Without an examination of the mediations of sexuality and power, without a sense of the reality of the characters Jarman focuses on, we cannot make the connection meaningful. Sebastian is a self-indulgent ascetic, Severus a raging inferno of dammed passion, Max a sadistic clown, Julian a sycophantic sidekick, all are two dimensional and ripped from context. Why Sebastian should become a masochistic ascetic in search of mystical union, whilst Julian, also a Christian, is a boring yes-man is unclear. Why Antony and Adrian get it on, and what the implications of their sexual relation are, all that is left unexplored.

The film purports to tackle avowedly difficult themes, and does nothing of the sort; its maxim is that "to fuck is good, and not to fuck makes you fucked up" but surely more needs to be said than this vulgar Reichian homily. The film is thus dishonest, and in so far as Jarman has not reflected on the scarcity of movies that deal with gayness and the whole problematic of sexual oppression and liberation, other than to make a fast buck out of that scarcity, he has made a reactionary movie contributing to the absorption of the sexual liberation movement into capitalism, contributing indeed to the continuing repressive desublimation of sexuality under capitalism.

There is still a need for films that explore the area that Jarman so resolutely skates round, as indeed there is still a need for films that deal explicitly with the situation now of gay men and women. Possibly the very success of *Sebastiane* might make it easier for gay film-makers to produce those films. My fear is that *Sebastiane* will serve as a model for a whole train of gay exploitation movies that will do nothing for the cause of sexual liberation. If that were to be the case then Jarman would bear a great deal of the responsibility.

Phil Derbyshire



Movement In Straight Circles

by Patrick Hughes and Teresa Savage

The Darwinian revolution in biology proposed to place 'man' firmly in a material reality. But the ways in which Darwinism was perceived were mediated by the dominant bourgeois ideology, so that 'science' came in to legitimate the socially created differences between men and women, and gave them an apparently biological justification. As a result homosexuals were excluded as aberrant, 'unnatural' Patrick Hughes and Teresa Savage explore the implications of this for the gay person and an outline of an alternative gender-free form of relating is proposed.

Definitions of "Man"

With the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species,* Man was placed firmly in the realms of biology, and man-as-a-species, defined through anatomical and physiological characteristics, replaced man-as-an-abstract-notion, a concept easily divorced from material reality. We are interested in the Darwinian concept of man-as-a-species because it is used to provide the 'scientific' basis on which to impose a model of 'normal' sexuality and, furthermore, to ascribe the status of 'normal' to heterosexuality. However, as a basis of sexual ideology, and as a way of understanding the relationship between man and the rest of the world, the concept of man-as-a-species has only limited value, as does the whole science of taxonomy from which it is derived. This is because the crux of the idea of evolution is the notion of an ever-changing world, and yet taxonomy, because of the limitations of its conceptual base, can only try to freeze that process of change, take a slice out of it and say "*Here* is the world." Further, taxonomy deals only in majorities and thus, by its existence, militates against the recognition of any new species – "Since these aberrations are a minority, they are exceptions to the still-standing rule."

Thus the existing notion of the species is retained, and exceptions are defined as such through their being negations of one or more of the definitive characteristics of that species. This practice of transforming biological phenomena into god-given laws, of labelling transient characteristics as self-evident truths, is used in a social sense too, in re-affirming 'natural' behaviour, 'normal' development, etc. In this way, by divorcing even the concept of man-as-a-species from the material world in which that species is continuing to develop, one is, in fact, still using an abstract notion of man as an unchanging species characterised, finally, by some definitive 'nature' or 'essence'. In this way, real definite changes can be depicted as almost irrelevant to the unchanging nature of humanity, and all human progress is reduced to nought.

Hence, when we see man-as-a-species discussed, it is, in fact, man-as-we-know-him that is meant, that is, contemporary man – hence the use of a plethora of sub-species which are used to separate contemporary man from our evolutionary ancestors. However, contemporary man is not just a title relating to a particular archaeological epoch – it is more urgent than that, because the way man is described is a reflection of the way his nature is seen in different types of society, since there are other criteria circumscribing 'man' (e.g. creativity, idealism) besides the biological ones. These criteria vary as ideologies vary over time, since ideologies mediate the human experience of itself in the world.

In Christian countries, it has always been thought that at least part of that human nature consists of "free will" – the idea that each individual's actions are performed free of any compulsion, and it is on this basis that Christianity has held individuals to be accountable to God for their actions. Freud, however, opposed this particular morality with the notion of the unconscious, a dark and mysterious force turning people's motives into echoes of their history and depicting their actions as reflections of their world. No longer was it possible to blithely talk of 'human nature' without relating it to the material world, and thus we moved away from a static conception of man, running like a vein through history, and moved towards a recognition that there is a continuing relationship between men and their world. This relationship is expressed in the fact that man's first historical act was the production of material life (food, drink, clothing, habitation, etc.), and human consciousness in this situation was merely of the immediate sensual environment, i.e. only limited connections exist with other persons and things.

It is the satisfaction of these first historical needs, an action leading to the emergence of new needs, which (together with increased population and productivity) brought about the development of consciousness from its sensuous state. This led Marx to propose in his *German*

Ideology that man is, in fact, the sum of the productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, and since the multitude of productive forces available determines the nature of society, the history of humanity must always be seen in relation to the history of industry and exchange or, as Sartre put it, ". . . man is the product of his product".[1] He also says that "Man's essence is his existence"[2] – in other words, man's categorical quality is his ability to manipulate and modify his world: we *are* what we *do,* and our *actions* are expressions of our*selves.*

Ideology and Sexuality

Before examining the way a particular ideology (that of the bourgeoisie) mediates one part of our experience of ourselves – our sexuality – and presents it as being within species-prescriptive limits, let us look at the general issue of the way different ideologies hold sway at different times, and thus how the different interpretations of man-as-a-species come and go. Marx suggested that ideology has its roots in the division of labour, in that once a division into physical and mental labour occurs, then human consciousness can be thought of as something other than consciousness *of existing practice* – ideas of 'pure' or 'abstract' thought arise, e.g. 'pure' philosophy, 'pure' mathematics, etc. Once this separation between thought and action has been made, it is possible to talk of different ideas holding sway at different times without relating those ideas to the material conditions of those times.

Marx describes ideology being dragged in the wake of the ruling classes: "The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships expressed as ideas; hence of the ideas which make one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance."[3] Those dominant ideas imply different self-constructs, and thus different interpretations of human nature. To take Marx's examples: 'honour', 'loyalty' etc. which were dominant in the rule of the aristocracy, speak of a society in which the self is seen in terms of others, i.e. one's sense of self is derived from the types of relationships that one has with one's contemporaries, rather than being derived from reflection, introspection, etc. In the society ruled by an aristocracy, one finds only a limited degree of social and geographical mobility, i.e. individuals were described (and thus 'man' in general was defined) through social categories, rather than through individual personality, and through the values associated with those categories – people were described according to their class, race, family, etc., and were valued according to the values associated with their feudal society – honour, loyalty, etc.

The growth of private capital heralded the eventual rule of the bourgeoisie, with their ruling ideology of 'freedom' and 'equality' etc. – ideas which had to be more general than those of the aristocracy, in order that they should be able to subsume the hitherto ruling ideas in the interests of the new ruling class. Freedom and equality speak of a society in which people's lives are lived in a situation other than the suffocating conditions of home-bound feudalism; a society with greater social and geographical mobility, enabling individuals to be characterised in terms other than those which spoke of their position and heritage in a static community – in terms, thus, of *themselves,* rather than their context. A corollary of this individual-orientated ideology was a morality in which 'others' were less significant than previously, and in which each person was responsible primarily to themselves for their actions (although still strictly within the Christian tradition, of course). Thus the proletariat, as it emerged, was a class characterised not only by its lack of property but also by the new way in which its members were conceptualised – as *individuals.*

It is against this explicitly class-based background that the ideologies leading to the various interpretations of 'human nature' must be seen, whether in the form of the abstract 'Man', or in the scientific form of 'Man-as-a-species'. Rooted in this scientific context, heterosexuality assumes the status of an inviolable biological law rather than simply the norm of a particular society, with the result that deviation from it is seen as a betrayal of the genes of man-as-a-species, as 'unnatural'. Accordingly, anyone who is not heterosexual is to that extent looked upon as inhuman. This is a real example of the way our concept of 'man' is a reflection of a particular ideology, in that a particular sexual orientation is described as unnatural whereas another, e.g. celibacy, is not; an example whose tangibility is the day-to-day experience of being homosexual in a heterosexual world.

The conclusion we draw from this is that the concept of such a genetic aberration is only as strong as the dominant (bourgeois) ideology, since the idea of such an aberration is dependent on that ideology which denies that man is continuing to develop, and wishes to freeze man's development at a point which serves its interests. Thus acceptance or rejection of certain phenomena as 'unnatural' can be seen as a power struggle – the power of bourgeois ideology to control the way people perceive and interpret their world, as opposed to the power of an emerging proletarian ideology with which to combat that control.

That abstract-sounding 'Darwinian model' presents itself to us in a very practical way, through such statements as "I relate differently to men than I do to women." That statement shows how we place our *social* relations within a *biological* framework, and let biological characteristics be the determinants of those relations. This is not to deny that the way we see both women and men is the result of them being presented to us in terms of certain stereotypes; to do so would be to deny that sexism exists at all, in any form. All we are saying is that biological differences, although mediated by societal and ideological definitions, are allowed to become the basis of social relations, whereby men and women are treated differently regardless of what they are socially. In this way, although sex differences may be biological facts, their expression is something which varies with societal expectations. If one is relating to people on this biological basis, then the notion of choosing the gender with which one relates sexually is implicit and so the implication of *uni*sexuality (homosexual or heterosexual) is inescapable.

We can see how Darwinism, founded on the idea that species adapt themselves to their environment, can only be useful in justifying the status quo if it is presented as a path of development which results in a species which is the most perfectly adapted to its environment – the crown of creation. We are suggesting that 'man', far from being such a climax, is a species capable of continuing its development, not just in line with biological laws, but also in a dialectical relation with a social world which man creates.

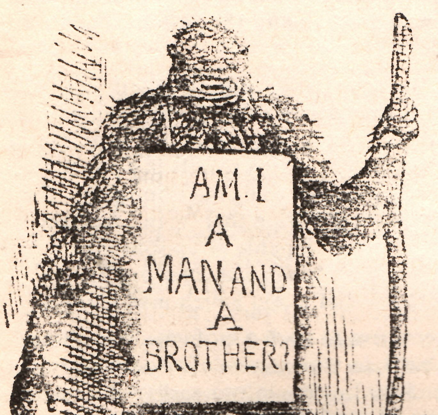
The alternative to such a biological basis to relationships is a social basis, in which one endeavours to relate equally to both genders. In view of our earlier comments about the social nature of gender definition, we cannot stress that word 'endeavour' too strongly – to relate in any depth to members of one's own gender means overcoming, amongst other things, the massive walls of competition which form part of bourgeois sexual roles. We cannot completely remove these walls, nor can we rid ourselves of the gender-specific behaviour which we, and millions before us, have been taught to believe is inherent – is, in fact, what constitutes 'us'.

We are, therefore, presented with two competing models of sexual expression: one that says that people are unisexual (either homosexual or heterosexual), and one that says that people are capable of being bisexual, but with the homosexual element repressed in some and the heterosexual element repressed in others. In the present period of rejection of sexual stereotypes and archetypes, when we are fighting against the objectification of our relationships by the petrifying hand of capital, we need alternative models of relating to each other, towards which we can strive while acknowledging that such ideological alternatives cannot be attained within an alien ideology; that their complete attainment needs a corresponding change in ideology.

The relevance of this assertion can be seen in the fact that although the overt expression of their sexuality by gays questions the *raison d'etre* of the nuclear family and monogamy, and opens the door to alternative ways of living together, gays rarely take up these alternatives. More often than not, homosexual relationships slavishly imitate heterosexual ones, e.g. the classic 'butch-femme' relationship. The 'social' model of relationships implies a situation where individuals aren't ascribed a permanent sexual status, i.e. homosexual or heterosexual, but in which these can be seen as different modes of sexuality, to be expressed by the individual according to their needs, and which includes, of course, the possibility of expressing both simultaneously. Within each mode, we would envisage differences in the ways in which people relate to each other, according to the degree of compatibility and according to the needs that they are satisfying.

The move towards such bisexual pluralism (i.e. the possibility of relating to as many people, of whatever sex, as one wishes, at whatever degree of involvement one desires) from unisexual monogamy poses the same problems for both homosexuals and heterosexuals: organisational alternatives to the nuclear family; 'jealousy' and the commodity basis of sexual relationships; individual isolation in situations creating insecurity – dependence; and the special problems of oppressed groups, e.g. gays and women. We believe that the task of the revolutionary in this pre-revolutionary period is to provide a political model of sexuality under capitalism which tackles the sexual ideology which makes bisexual plurality so difficult to attain, while taking account of the particular oppression of gays, the repression of straight, and the socio-economic-sexual oppression of women, and we hope that this article is providing an approach to that model. Part of the process of developing such a model is challenging the existing notions of sexuality, which gays can do every time they overtly express their own sexuality.

MONKEYANA.


AM I A MAN AND A BROTHER?

Lonely, frustrated Sexual Politicians

Challenging the gender-specific ideology which underpins existing notions can, for gays more than straights, have self-destructive effects, stemming, we believe, from the isolation of being gay. Firstly, we mean far more than just the inevitable social isolation, although this is in no way to underestimate it. Although the range of social situations explicitly open to gays is increasing, it must be emphasised that, as things stand, for a gay person to have a 'social' life takes a positive effort to involve themselves in specific situations, whereas straights exist and operate in those same situations as part of their on-going identification with their society. They do not feel that sense of sexual separation, although they may feel a reaction against the commercial exploitation and objectification of their sexuality. Straight people can only feel that sense of sexual separation in explicitly gay situations.

The second aspect of gay isolation has to do with one's sense of being (ontology). Inasmuch as we live in an explicitly heterosexually-orientated society, our self-constructs tend towards that type of model, a fact underlying gay sexual guilt. We are not suggesting that heterosexuality is the only basis on which people in a heterosexually-orientated society can build self-constructs – the sheer existence of self-proclaimed gays belies such an idea. What we are saying is that the process of constructing a sense of self is much more difficult if you are gay because you do not have the continual self-affirming mechanisms that heterosexual self-constructs do (advertising, child-care legislation and housing policy are three examples that spring to mind). So, as part of their socio-sexual isolation, gays have to develop a sense of ontological security, as have straights, but they do so without the massive, continual societal affirmation that heterosexuals have. All this gives gays a different perception of the world from straights, and thus adds a cognitive barrier to the social ones that already exist between us and straights. Finally, since lesbians are likely to have a heightened awareness of the likelihood of sexism and power-games forming part of the social interaction of men (an awareness due precisely to that altered perception), they are likely to shun social situations in which they are likely to be caught up in such behaviour.

Thus, not only do gays face the apparently universal problem of finding compatible partners with which to develop loving relationships, but also, having done so, it is likely that those sexual relationships will be exclusive ones, because of their heightened need for reciprocity, such as can only be obtained in relationships with people who share one's perception of the world. The need for reciprocity exists in all of us, but is heightened in gays because we cannot become involved as easily in the multitude of partially-reciprocal relationships which straights can. The result is an 'artificial' separation in the people we meet into 'other gays' and 'the rest', in that what we all desire, surely, is a situation in which we feel free to relate, at whatever level we desire, to whoever we wish. The fact that we are unable to do so at present is due to societal attitudes to sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular, as part of the gender-specific ideology. Those attitudes don't, of course, stop us from having that freedom to relate to each other, but they make deviation from the norm, such as a plurality of lovers, even more difficult for gays to achieve than straights.

Within our loving relationships with other gays, there is likely to be not only the affection, trust, love, etc. that one would expect in any loving relationship, but also the sort of solidarity that can only exist between members of an oppressed group – a solidarity heightened in lesbians, since both our sexuality and our gender oppress us. Thus relationships with other gays are intrinsically self-affirming, as are all relationships with 'significant others', and they are also buttresses against the external pressures we have mentioned. This, we would suggest, is likely to be a very effective counter-balance to the difficulties of maintaining a loving gay relationship in a straight world, where to be gay is to be anything from 'different' to 'abnormal'. Any break-up in such a relationship, therefore, is *more* likely to be because of 'internal' factors, e.g. the basis on which the relationship is initiated; differing personal development; changing interests; and, of course, monogamy.

Monogamy can be seen either as a desire to get totally involved with one person (and thus a disinterest in others), or as a desire to stop that one other person from getting involved with anyone else. Obviously, the two motives are related; the point is, which one has primacy in a particular situation? Whatever its motive, monogamy as an expression of a need for an exclusive sexual relationship introduces another artificial separation in the people we meet, this time between one's exclusive partner and 'the rest'. Once again, we describe this separation as artificial because it stops us and our partner from relating to whoever we choose in whatever way we choose, and because we believe that it is based on societal attitudes to sexuality in general and its place within the nuclear family in particular. Also, it is thought 'unusual' to relate closely to more than one person simultaneously -- one has *a* best friend at a time; *a* sexual partner at a time, but no more! All this doesn't stop us from constructing non-monogamous situations, but it does raise questions about them -- how realistic is it to expect them to work in a monogamy-based society; and is it at all realistic to expect an established relationship (even though non-monogamous) to be able to offer sufficient security and trust to an incoming member for them to make the considerable investment in emotional energy which is necessary to enable them to enter and broaden that original relationship.

Having examined our relationships with other gays, let us look at our relationships with 'the rest', i.e. heterosexuals and bisexuals. We doubt whether there can, in capitalist society at this stage, be that sense of shared perception we mentioned earlier as a pre-requisite for closeness, in relations between gays and straights, and so the cognitive barrier is a barrier to close relationships too. This is also the case with bisexuals; further, when a gay is in a loving relationship with a bisexual, this is especially anxiety-producing, because the straight relationship(s) that the bisexual may have will need less effort and commitment to maintain, because they are acceptable and 'normal'. This means that there is always a chance of a bisexual renouncing their gay lover(s) as needing too much time and trouble, when similar rewards are to be had for less from a straight person. There is also the possibility, of course, that one's bisexual partner is *affecting* bisexuality either to keep the option of 'normality' open while they flirt with their homosexual propensities, or simply because it's hip to say you're bisexual these days.

All these factors feed back to, and increase, that sense of homosexual isolation which we introduced so long ago. Will the circle stay unbroken . . . ?

Notes

1 Sartre, J-P. *Search for a Method*. Tr. Barnes. Random House. New York. 1963. p92.

2 ibid.

3 Marx, K. *The German Ideology*. Lawrence & Wishart. 1965. p60.

Book Reviews

WE SPEAK FOR OURSELVES
by Jack Babuscio
(SPCK, 1976 £2.95)

'We Speak For Ourselves' is the first British book published in this country about homosexuals by a gay man who has been involved in the gay movement. Jack Babuscio has chronicled the methods and the language which essentially arise out of the tradition of the women's and gay movements. This tradition has asserted the need to talk openly about the 'personal' in order that we may struggle to be 'open', 'honest' and 'self-accepting' about our gayness.

The major intention of this book is to enable non-gay counsellors of gay women and men to come to an understanding of 'what it means to be gay'. Jack Babuscio has drawn together many gay people's experiences from his work as a counsellor (he was at one time an organiser of Friend) and, in so doing, he outlines the complex maze which confronts any counsellor/befriender working with gay women and men who come to talk about their fears, rejection, isolation and misery.

Transcriptions of tape recordings form the largest part of the book and have the positive effect of bringing to life, in a moving way, terms which we usually associate with conventional psychiatry and religion. This process enables us to identify the 'problems' through gay people's experiences, rather than identifying gay women and men through the 'problems'.

For gay liberationists and Marxists, however, this book presents several dilemmas. It explores ways in which individuals may help gay women and men to overcome their isolation and oppression – something we all support. However, Jack Babuscio says, 'Each individual represented in these pages speaks for him or herself alone.' But it is precisely through this individualising process that psychiatry, religion and the state have been able to isolate us in our personal struggles for a social and sexual identity. We need to look for common ground upon which to explore this identity – as one of the commentators in the book says, 'In coming together with other gays who are also trying to raise their level of consciousness . . . I feel I've come much, much closer to understanding myself and others.' In other words, the struggle against sexual oppression will necessitate us submerging some of our individualism and recognising that it is only through collective action that that we will eventually be able to explore our individual potential.

Jack Babuscio also tends to argue that gay women and men will have their lives validated solely by changes in non-gay people's attitudes: 'Tolerance must be replaced by both understanding and, most of all, by acceptance of homosexuality as a valid lifestyle. Until such times as attitudes are substantively changed, however, gay people will continue to regard passing [as straight] as an attractive alternative to being open and self-accepting. And such a decision . . . can only be accompanied by the most unhappy consequences.'

What is missing in this statement is the anger, the energy and pride which was generated through gay liberation and which shouted out – 'We won't wait for heterosexuals to validate our lives, we'll do it for ourselves.' Jack Babuscio, therefore, omits what can be gained from struggle generated out of anger and oppression.

The final problem posed for Marxists is that attempting to change people's consciousness without changing the material base which shapes that consciousness will inevitably lead to a situation where we as gay women and men have to validate our lives within the framework of bourgeois norms and values. As long as that framework continues to exist, the social relations between women and men, gay and non-gay will always be unequal and will therefore lead to the vast majority of us feeling oppressed and exploited.

None of the problems which the book raises does Babuscio answer or even suggest that they exist. However, as a book about personal discovery and self-acceptance, it is warm and moving. Its case histories show the ways in which all of us can begin to explore collectively areas of our lives which were once considered only 'private and personal'. Through this process we can begin to understand the importance of the personal-political and the role sexual politics has to play in any revolutionary struggle.

Nigel Young

Radical Science Journal, 9 Poland St, London W1

No. 5 now available £1.00

WOMEN AWAKE
The Experience of Consciousness Raising
By Sue Bruley

Sue Bruley's pamphlet is a very interesting combination of the 'personal' and 'political'. It is written as a personal account of a woman's development out of the 'dogmatic' politics of IS through the experience of a consciousness-raising group. The political issues raised by this experience are arousing a great deal of interest not only in the women's and gay movement, but throughout the left.

Sue Bruley's statement against "a dogmatic Leninist position" should not, I think, be read as a rejection of Leninism, of a democratic centralist form of organisation. Many feminists who are committed to Leninism – both inside and outside left groups – are also committed to revolutionising our concept of what 'Leninism' has to become to meet the new needs, experience and political developments of the present period. The "basic inability of the left to take sexism seriously" is a dangerous obstacle to the whole movement, because it restricts our ability to understand bourgeois ideology and to speak to the day-to-day experience of the oppressed. Consciousness-raising itself provides an important model of politicisation of the 'personal' which none of the left can afford to ignore.

One of the most interesting issues raised by the group described in this pamphlet is the following division: "The group was basically split in its attitude towards men. On one side their entire lives were directed by their involvement with men, on the other side, relationships with men were not fundamental, had to be treated with great suspicion, and were always of less importance than relationships with other women." This split is defined at an early stage in the group's development, and seems to me to be more than a question of sexual orientation. "Those in the group who were gay thought that the basis for a distinction between gay and straight women on the grounds of sexual preference was *wrong* and that any woman who wanted to relate to "other women in a serious way should be proud to call herself a Lesbian." For women, the gay/straight distinction is not definable in male terms. Many gay men have made the mistake of thinking that it is. Female sexuality has been so suppressed, repressed, abused and denied for so long that the expression and liberation of our sexuality is a more fundamental issue than 'gay or straight'. Some of the group didn't think they had ever had an orgasm. "Heterosexual sex is prick-centred and rarely takes female needs into consideration . . ." Few of us have found it possible to regain control over our sexuality in relation to men, for the simple reason that we are oppressed and our sexuality-for-men is necessarily corrupted and distorted. Is there a revolutionary feminist way of being heterosexual?

The discussion on 'love' and 'couples' is also interesting. "This designation of some relationships as 'special' necessarily subordinates all other relationships and therefore reinforces women's isolation and dependence (psychological as well as economic) on men." This problem of exclusivity, whether in gay or 'straight' couples, is rooted in the bourgeois institution of monogamy, which still defines our practice in sexual relationships. Sex is a commodity, and is split: either the 'real thing' or 'not' the 'real thing'. The double standard still imposes itself on all kinds of relationships. Sue took the view "that the women's movement would always be seriously handicapped whilst women remained in couple relationships with men, and therefore, one of the tasks of women's liberation must be to make women both believe and *feel* that they can be complete outside of a couple relationship". If we take this statement as a practical proposal about what goes on in left groups, for example, we get an idea of the extent of the struggle this would involve, and its necessity. Women cannot develop politically if they either remain psychologically dependent on men, or feel pressured into holding up their development by forming the kind of relationships they need not have chosen. The potential of gay relationships is that, although many fall into the same trap, they necessarily challenge conventional forms.

"CR can act as a bridge between the personal and the political." The nature of women's politicisation is all-important. Women who have not experienced "what sisterhood is all about . . . *putting women first*" will learn the type of 'political consciousness' which becomes a self-oppressive commitment to fighting others' oppression and forgetting our own; a barrier not only to feminist awareness but to the emergence of conscious, thinking, critical and independent revolutionaries.

Celia Holt

THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF WOMEN
Edited and Introduced by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley
(Penguin £1.25)

This is a collection of twelve essays on topics ranging over history, sociology and literature. The emergence of the women's movement has resulted in feminists re-assessing the ways in which women have been perceived – if at all – in these areas of study in particular, challenging the material and ideological basis on which male supremacy is built. As the editors state, there is no overall political perspective uniting the essays, rather they are a reflection of the diverse ways in which women's lives and consciousness have been moulded and an attempt to reveal their existence where history has ignored them. The essays largely take the form of traditional academic studies in which aspects of our social structure and the process of male control are investigated. In the first, Oakley gives an account of how the care and treatment of women during childbirth was taken out of the hands of women themselves and became controlled by the professional medical establishment of men. Another gives a description of the changing attitudes towards the education of girls which now professes the aim of equality of opportunity with boys, but this masks the sexism inherent in the educational system and its role in the wider society.

Rosalind Delmar's essay is an examination of some of the central points in Engels' analysis of the family; the emergence of men's economic power, the transition from mother-right and the institution of paternity and monogamy. She then considers Engels' proposition that the overturning of this oppression rests on women regaining economic independence through entry into socialised production and examines briefly the experience in China since the revolution where this theory has been partially realised. There have been enormous advances and changes in women's role and a transformation of the family but the limitations that exist are not just a result of China's backwardness but are due to the deficiencies of traditional socialist analysis. This has now been extended by the feminist movement in their critique of the sexual division of labour and the monogamous family based on sex-love, which, under both western capitalism and the 'socialist states', are evidently central to the oppression of women's and gay sexuality.

The intricate nature of sexism in our society affects every aspect of our lives and becomes part of our individual psychology. In the most interesting essay, Margaret Walters illustrates this in the dilemmas encountered by three women writers – Wollstonecraft, Martineau and de Beauvoir – in their struggles as women with a feminist consciousness. Their rejection of the traditional feminine role met with wide criticism. The freedom they strove for was confounded by the limitations of individual action in developing a consciousness independent of the feminine stereotype without merely taking on a masculine identity to achieve a supposed equality. It is only with the growth of the women's movement that the roles of both femininity and masculinity can be challenged and the rejection of the confining stereotype of one does not mean the wholesale subjugation to and restrictions of the other.

Although most of the essays are very interesting, few cover ground that is new to people with a knowledge of the feminist movement and there is little which touches on the immediate problems which confront the movement at this point. However, the tasks of rewriting history and interpreting the social world from a feminist perspective is a valuable one.

An important point made by the editors is their shared criticism of some aspects of the present women's movement, in particular the concept of 'sisterhood'. Though useful as a starting point in building a common awareness of oppression and showing the personal as political, they now feel that it is blinding women to the absence of any real unity. The same problem confronts the gay movement. As a quote from *Body Politic* said recently, "For gay lib to pretend that class loyalties within the gay community are not stronger than gay brotherhood is fatuous and irresponsible." Unity cannot be made by merely wishing it, it must be based on the movement's analysis and actual struggle.

Keith Birch

Ideologues of Sex
THE MODERNISATION OF SEX
by Paul A Robinson
(Paul Elek, London. 1976. £4.95)

There are many theoretical and practical problems in writing historical studies of sex. There's the problem of sources; the problem of interpretation; the problem of what people understand by 'sex' at any particular time. As a result historical studies often veer dangerously between vulgar empiricism, where we are given 'facts' unadulterated by interpretation; and a cosmic theorisation, what Ken Plummer has called "metatheoretical excursions" where facts are given short shrift. Most sexual historians take a cautious way out: they look at the ideas on sexuality that were generated at any particular time, and generalise backwards, seeing ideas as a direct reflection of behaviour. Thus Victorian sexual ideology is seen as a mirror of Victorian behaviour rather than what it almost certainly was, a dialectical and contradictory response, partly reflection, partly moral injunction, partly false consciousness. Paul Robinson in this book takes another path: he treats the work and writings of his 'modernisers', Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey and William Masters and Virginia Johnson, as episodes in the history of ideas:

> "It is the fundamental assumption of this book that sexual thought is now an integral component of our intellectual history, and accordingly that the most important modern sexual theorists deserve as much attention from intellectual historians as the great philosophers, theologists and social thinkers of the age."

This is a useful approach and the strength of the book stems from it. The three major sections of the book clearly examine the modes of thought, the central concepts of each thinker (or in the case of Masters and Johnson, partnership), and examines them within their own terms to draw out the strengths and weaknesses, the unifying consistencies and the major inconsistencies. Robinson uses the traditional methods of intellectual history and in doing so is able to reveal the sinews of each work under review.

The weakness of the approach is the complement of the strength. For in exploring them in their own terms Robinson loses a vital dimension by failing to locate them within the structures and feelings of their time. This is particularly true of Havelock Ellis, whose sexual writings from the 1890s to the 1930s are stretched dangerously between the poles of revolt and conservatism. His writings on women especially can only be understood by reference to the major ideological offensive in the early part of the century which stressed the role of motherhood and woman's traditional sphere. He wrote with approval, "woman breeds and tends; man provides, it remains so even when the spheres tend to overlap". Ellis was a socialist, but he was also an enthusiastic eugenecist, who believed that in motherhood, the woman is

> "lifted above the level of ordinary humanity to become the casket of an inestimable jewel".

Ellis' career is very instructive on the evolution of British socialism, and the limitations of sexual liberalism, but this can only be brought out by locating him in a specific social and cultural milieu. Robinson argues that Ellis, Kinsey and Masters and Johnson have contributed to a recognisably modern way of looking at sex, as in many ways they have. But the crucial question of why their ideas and influence should have taken root is left unexplored.

Robinson formally links them by his use of the term 'modernisation'. Their contribution is assessed against the yardstick of a postulated modernising enterprise, whose central characteristics are revolt against 'Victorianism'; a new 'enthusiasm' for sex; a willingness to broaden the definition of sexuality, and to explore 'deviant' sex; a greater stress on female sexuality; and a questioning of the traditional institutional framework for sexuality, marriage and the family. But the notion of 'modernisation' has unfortunate connotations; it implies a process (with strong analogies to economic modernisation) whereby attitudes have moved from a state of primitive ignorance to shining freshness. Robinson is himself well aware of the limitations of the concept he employs, but the form of the essays prevent him from theorising these. I think a more useful concept would be that of 'liberalisation', a political not a technological process, which implies a loosening of the bonds rather than a climb from darkness into light. But the fact is that the essays are only loosely bound together by the concept; they are basically selfcontained examinations of three different moments in the development of sexual liberalism.

Not surprisingly the differing concerns of the four people reflect this. Ellis was anxious to establish that certain categories existed in a culture which only vaguely accepted them (e.g. 'female sexuality', 'homosexuality', etc.). In a sense he did not so much challenge 'Victorianism' as *create* it as a coherent coconut shy to attack. His work gained clarity as it attacked a well-lit enemy. Kinsey was concerned with documenting sexual behaviour; his early career as a student of insects was reflected in his later endeavour as a chronicler of sexual behaviour. By massively detailed questionnaires distributed to thousands of men and women he hoped to build up a consensus of how people actually behaved sexually in bed (and out of it). His detractors, not surprisingly, felt he was revealing a can of worms. But his determined materialism and naturalism, and his concentration on behaviour as it was, helped undermine the pieties of received ideologies. By the 1960s Masters and Johnson could safely assume the merits of sexuality; they sought to make it function better by developing techniques of sexual therapy. But implicit in their determined efforts to help couples to fuck better is an implied theory: that sex far from being a massively threatening force can be the essential glue in keeping a marriage intact.

The interesting element that Robinson's work reveals is the severe limitations on the radicalism of each of the people he studies. Ellis was trapped within gender role assumptions as clearly as any of the Victorians he attacked. Nor could Kinsey, despite his documentation of the widespread incidence of homosexual behaviour, quite escape defending the superiority of heterosexuality and the 'natural' basis of male and female differences. And Masters and Johnson, with their clinical encouragement of sex technique learning, only treated couples (and usually rich middle class couples at that) and ended up themselves marrying one another. Far from challenging marriage or the family their work explicitly elevated their significance.

Despite this, these three moments in sexual liberalisation have had important effects on the development of contemporary attitudes to homosexuality. Ellis was a prime mover in the conceptualisation of homosexuality as a 'condition', a characteristic of certain types of individuals, the 'invert' or 'homosexual', which dominated reformist discussions up to the 1960s. Kinsey's methodology has dominated most progressive thought on homosexuality over the past decade; its documentation of the widespread incidence of homosexuality, the emphasis on sexual response rather than identity, and the use of analogies from animal behaviour; all have had a real liberating effect on the discussion of homosexuality. Their limitation is the traditional one of most behaviourist tendencies: the failure to explore the historical determinants of social behaviour and consciousness.

Masters and Johnson have so far had less direct influence on discussion of homosexuality (though a large scale study is due to appear from them soon). But in their examination of female sexuality, and in particular their recognition of the central importance of the clitoral orgasm, aspects of their work have been integrated into feminist and lesbian debate.

The weakness of all these ideologies, however, is the weakness also of Robinson's book: the failure to recognise that not only are sexual attitudes received and learned, they are also transformed by conscious political activity. Robinson talks a little about the 'feminism' of Masters and Johnson without any awareness of its limitations in their work. And there is only a passing reference to the significance of the gay liberation movement. Yet whatever their limitations as political movements there can be little doubt that both the women's and the gay movements represent the possibility of a conscious transformation not only of sexual behaviour but also of sexual theory. That would be a real 'modernisation', one that this book, despite its many good qualities, does not anticipate.

Jeffrey Weeks

Note

An essay on 'Havelock Ellis and the Politics of Sexual Reform' forms part 2 of Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks' *Socialism and The New Life* (Pluto Press, June 1977). Part 1 is an essay on 'Edward Carpenter, Prophet of The New Life'.

THE GENDER TRAP
A Closer Look at Sex Roles by Carol Adams and Rae Laurikietis
Book 1: Education & Work; Book 2: Sex & Marriage; Book 3: Messages & Images.
(Virago. 1976. £1.25 each)

These three books between them provide very clear, simple but thorough coverage of the way gender roles permeate different facets of our lives. Each book is split into two units, and each unit into between six and nine sections illustrating one particular aspect of the theme of the unit. Thus the first unit in Book 1, 'The Best Years of Your Life', includes sections on teachers, reading, choice of career and toys. The books are very concisely written, with many written and visual examples to illuminate the text. There are questions posed and topics for further discussion raised both within and at the end of most sections. It is in this respect alone that one becomes aware that the books are intended, to a large extent, for use in schools and colleges.

The books deal in a matter of fact way with traditionally difficult topics for educational material such as homosexuality, pornography, abortion and rape. These and many other topics are integrated into a work which shows that gender role stereotypes pervade all aspects of our lives, sometimes subtly, sometimes blatantly. Many facts are presented and few readers will find the books simplistic if only because of the wealth of material that is presented, enabling everyone to find at least some of the information or examples new and refreshing.

Derek J. Cohen

JUST LIKE A GIRL
How Girls Learn To Be Women
by Sue Sharpe
(Penguin 95p)

This is a book which could never have been written without the Women's Movement. It is also an excellent informative introduction to their ideas. Sue Sharpe begins by outlining the historical changes which have affected women over the past hundred years, particularly access to education and absorption into the labour force. She goes on to look at the processes of socialisation whereby parents, school, the media and the rest of the world try to ensure that girls become feminine.

The most interesting sections of the book are on the realities that face girls at school, at work and at home. A favourite bourgeois cliche is that women are equal nowadays thanks to legislation like the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Employment Protection Act. The argument says that if they can't achieve equality now then it must be their own fault. Sharpe exposes the fallacious nature of this argument by showing how girls are trapped by the 'hidden curriculum' at school which pushes them into traditional 'feminine' subjects and keeps them away from scientific and technical ones; how careers advice is biased towards lowering expectations so that a girl who wants to be a doctor is recommended to do radiology; and how most of the expectations of women are still curtailed by the problems of what to do with their children. Saddest of all is the fact that there is less resistance than one might expect from the girls themselves because of the way they have been socialised into having fewer and lower expectations of self-development.

The whole book, including an interesting section on black girls in Britain, does not leave one with feelings of joy or optimism. What is clear is that all the legislation in the world will not fundamentally alter women's position without a transformation of the material forces in society and consequent transformation of attitudes by us all.

Bob Cant

ABORTION IN DEMAND
by Victoria Greenwood and Jock Young
(Pluto Press 1976)

Abortion law reform in the 1960s was, like the reform of the law relating to male homosexuality in England and Wales, a product of a particular type of sexual liberalism. It stressed not sexual freedom, or the right to choose one's sexuality, but the need to remove certain glaring abuses. As the authors of this book clearly underline, the aim in abortion law reform was to help people who were seen as marginal or inadequate. There was no emphasis at all on a woman's right to control her own fertility. Similarly homosexual law reform was based on the assumption that homosexuality was an unfortunate condition, better controlled by being conditionally approved. And yet both Acts had unintended consequences. The opportunity was taken by women and by gay men to use the Acts to extend their freedom to choose. It was as a reaction against these unintended results that many of the liberal supporters of abortion law reform in the 1960s now stand in the forefront of the parliamentary attempt (backed by reactionary support nationally) to restrict abortion. Few voices have yet been heard to say that homosexual reform went too far (though the Festival of Light have suggested the age of consent should be raised to 24) but we should draw the consequences of the retreat on abortion. The struggle for extending a woman's right to choose is part and parcel of our struggle for sexual autonomy. This useful and well argued book begins to show us why.

Jeffrey Weeks

MOZAMBICAN WOMEN

The victory of Frelimo against the Portuguese in Mozambique was welcomed by socialists all over the world. To those of us who had supported the solidarity movements such a victory had often seemed impossible and when it did happen it was like a miracle. But it was no miracle – it was a victory based on over ten years' hard struggle and organisation. During the war of liberation, women and men had played an equal part in the struggle to end Portuguese domination. But when the military struggle came to an end the role of women was no longer so clear. Were they to go back to their old roles? Was their revolutionary role to be the preparation of meals for male comrades? Were they to play an equal and essential part with men in the creation of a new society? Mozambican women were concerned about these problems and called a conference in Maputo in November 1976 to discuss them and to plan how to combat them.

A report of the conference has recently been published in English. Some sections of it deal with the problems facing women still living a traditional life-style – such as initiation rites, bride price and polygamy. They recognise that initation is designed to make girls submissive to men and that education programmes are required to end it. The relationship between this sexual submission and the general passivity of women in Mozambican society is perceived, if only on an elementary level. The problems of bride price and polygamy, however, are much more rooted in the poverty of the country. The involvement of women as equals in the collective production of wealth will, hopefully, play a great part in the abolition of these evils – although further education and consciousness raising are necessary. Those who continue to practise these customs will be denied access to positions of political responsibility.

The conference also recognised the way in which bourgeois ideology, particularly in the form of liberalism, affected the lives of many women in the cities. The structure of city life had been such that many women had been abandoned with young children, had been unable to find employment, had turned to prostitution, had become alcoholics and so on. Once again the same kind of solutions are proposed – collective involvement in the process of production, plus education.

Abortion is regarded as a 'grave social problem' and an unwanted pregnancy as a sign that the woman has failed to 'see the true meaning of love and the part played by sexual relationship in love and life'. This is clearly different from the attitude of the women's movement in industrialised countries but is hardly surprising in a society with such a high incidence of infant mortality. Greater emphasis is to be placed on spreading information about family planning.

What is particularly impressive is the ideological perspective of the document on love. They believe that many women are misled by ideas that they have found in 'rosy-coloured films and literature such as magazines – all spread by the colonial-bourgeois system'. They see that the privatisation and distortion of love and sexuality is a political phenomenon which is not natural but a reflection of a particular society. They argue, therefore, that there must be a spread of the concept of 'revolutionary and militant love'.

The whole document is fascinating, particularly in the insight it provides into the attempt of a poor African country to construct a socialist society. It raises many important issues about the way sexual/emotional lives would be changed in revolutionary situations. While they hold with the traditional Marxist idea that the liberation of women will come about through their involvement in the economic process they go further and argue for more education to establish a new ideology of personal relationships. It should be borne in mind too that these are formal conference decisions and the real practice may differ a great deal from what was agreed in Maputo. But it is still much too early to make any meaningful comment.

One important area where serious criticism must be made, however, relates to the family and the roles within it. They still see the family as the 'basic social cell'. They nowhere define family as being either nuclear or extended but this emphasis on the family of whatever size can only be reactionary. Since there is no discussion of the allocation of housework or child care it must be assumed that it will remain the primary responsibility of the woman. Statements are made calling for the need for men to be made 'conscious that as fathers they must take equal responsibility for the education of the children'. Little more than this, however, is said on the role of fathers. In most other areas of discussion the emphasis is on collective involvement with women – but the collective approach is nowhere mentioned in relation to family life. And family life based around a mother and a father is the place where privatisation and roles are learned and consequently a seed-bed for the growth of bourgeois ideology.

Finally, the point must be made that there is no reference of any sort to homosexuality – either female or male. Bearing in mind Mozambique's social formation this is hardly surprising. Although there was, doubtless, male gay prostitution in large coastal cities in the colonial period it is probably the case that few Mozambicans see themselves as gay in any way that we would understand. Such lack of gay consciousness may be one of the main reasons for the silence on the topic. There is, as yet, no reason to see the silence as similar to the anti-gay hostility so vociferously expressed by the Cuban regime. It is a situation about which gay socialists must feel concern but one about which few of us are qualified to make informed criticism.

None the less, although there may be little or no conscious gay self-identification, sexual activity between people of the same sex takes place in Mozambique as it takes place everywhere. And the questions that we should consider in relation to future debates on Mozambique are – firstly, how do people who take part in homosexual activity see themselves and that sexual activity?; secondly, how does Frelimo see these people and their sexual activity?

A full report of this conference is given in *People's Power* No 6, obtainable from Mozambique, Angola and Guine Information Centre (MAGIC), 12 Little Newport Street, London WC2.

Bob Cant

SEXUAL DIVISIONS AND SOCIETY: PROCESS AND CHANGE

Edited by Diana Leonard Barker and Sheila Allen

(Tavistock Publications, London. 1976. £3.25)

This is the first of two volumes of papers given at the British Sociological Association's Conference on Sexual Divisions and Society, held in April 1974 (the second volume is published by Longmans). The papers deal, as the editors put it, with "aspects of social relationships consistently neglected by sociologists and ridiculed or denigrated by some". The papers are a creative resistance to this denigration. They vary in quality, inevitably, but cover a wide range: relationships among women in Morocco; sexual bias in British community studies; the ideological and social implications of divorce; the social construction of instincts; the implications of birth control; the effect of the Chinese revolution on women; the implications of communal living.

The editors offer a definition of sexism which is coherent and worth noting: "We suggest that as a sociological concept it indicates situations where the differences between men and women are not only emphasised, but consistently and systematically so, to the detriment of women, i.e. they are institutionalised. Such differences are frequently, though not exclusively legitimated by biological assumptions."

Mike Brake explores the implications of such a definition in his paper, 'I May be a Queer, But at Least I am a Man'. He demonstrates that not only gender definitions but sexual meanings are socially constructed. He links together heterosexuality and homosexuality in terms of an overall male hegemony, so that even in gay relationships heterosexual male patterns are aped. He explores this theme in terms of typical responses to transvestism and transsexuality, and concludes with a rather cosmic hope that the radical gay movement will offer a way out of the male created impasse.

> "Involvement in the gay struggle is understanding and opposing sexism and supporting those who are sexually oppressed . . . the suffering of gay people is the result of the oppression of prescribed gender with its appropriate behaviour and psychology. It is not the fault of the oppressed – the screaming queens, butch dykes, transvestites, and transsexuals."

It is true, if not very generally recognised, that the locus of sharpest oppression has shifted from homosexual behaviour *per se* to the conceptually less clear cut areas of transvestism, transsexuality and paedophilia. Mike Brake's paper points the way to exploring these areas of sexuality or sex related behaviour. He is over-optimistic at this stage, however, in thinking that a large scale radical gay movement is likely to exist to take them up.

The B.S.A. Conference was largely concerned with gender divisions and the essays reflect this. Over the past year or so, however, a group in the B.S.A. has set up a study group on sexuality, which has so far had two conferences, and a gay research group. Together they offer the opportunity to explore the theoretical and practical problems of understanding sexual meanings in a manner influenced by a feminist and a gay liberationist outlook. They can be contacted through B.S.A., 13 Endsleigh Street, London WC1.

Jeffrey Weeks

HOUSEWIFE
by Ann Oakley
(Penguin Books 80p)

Ann Oakley's classic study first published in 1974, now in paperback, describes how women's role developed in industrial society; how they become a source of cheap labour and the part they played in the production of surplus value. She also describes how the ideology of women's role as a housewife occurred in the late nineteenth century – basically as unpaid servant and childminder (the period, incidentally, in which current attitudes towards homosexuality developed). Case histories of four housewives tell how women see themselves today. A final section outlines the need for a revolution in the ideology of gender roles and the concepts of gender identity. An important socialist feminist book for us all.

Emmanuel Cooper

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Letters

Gay Left c/o 36a Craven Road, London W2

AN OPEN LETTER TO SWP GAY GROUP

Dear Comrades,

I was rather disappointed that there has been no reply from the Gay Group in SWP (formerly IS) to the article which I wrote in *Gay Left* No 3 about my experiences in the IS Gay Group between 1973 and 1975. It is true that an article was received from an individual in the group but it was not claimed that this was a reply and was, for other reasons, withdrawn.

People in SWP constantly tell me that the attitude towards sexual politics has changed and there is now much more discussion on the issue. That may be the case internally but one would certainly never guess it from reading *Socialist Worker, Women's Voice* or *International Socialist Journal.* There have, it is true, been occasional articles about victimised gay workers but this is actually nothing new.

Paul Foot's book, *Why You Should Be A Socialist,* makes several interesting points about women and the family but nowhere does he call into question the roles and heterosexual norms which are central to such oppression. There is not even a token line about sexism – let alone homosexuality.

I began to wonder what you were doing to change the level of debate on sexism in SWP. I suspected, on the basis of my own experience, that you were so eager to prove yourselves good comrades that you only raised such questions in a way which would be acceptable to the existing programme of the organisation.

When I saw a leaflet which you produced recently about an anti-fascist demo in North London I felt I was correct. You pointed out very clearly the links between gay oppression and fascism. But then, stuck on at the end of the leaflet, without any explanation, there was the distinctive SWP slogan 'Fight For The Right To Work'. This is not a slogan with which I disagree, but given that you were addressing yourselves to the gay community which often has little knowledge of work-place politics it seems odd that you did not clarify the links between this and the rest of the leaflet.

There is no way that you can exist meaningfully in the SWP without conflict. This is not because the leadership of SWP is particularly sexist but because of the nature of the demands that arise from sexual politics. Sexual politics questions roles and the way people relate to each other. These questions are threatening to everyone – and Leninist parties (to my knowledge) have not yet found a way of adequately dealing with them. They may deal with victimisations, police harassment and law reform but roles and relationships are much, much harder. Taking them up seriously will bring all sorts of accusations on you – 'obsessed with sex', 'petit bourgeois wanker', 'unreliable' to name but a few. Your past record and other revolutionary activity will be as nothing when you challenge such deeply-rooted assumptions. But if you are serious about revolutionary sexual politics you must challenge these assumptions now.

Your task is a hard one. I, like you, believe in both the necessity for some kind of Leninist party and the importance of sexual politics but I do not know how to reconcile them. That process, whatever form it takes, will be painful. If you think it can be done without conflict you are deceiving yourselves.

So, comrades, what are you doing?

Fraternally and with love

Bob Cant

German Friends

We are a group of left gays, who have read your journal *Gay Left* no.1 with great interest. Especially your article about Cuba was quite good, so that it was translated into German. It then was printed in *Rosa,* that's a journal of the "Homosexuelle Aktion Hamburg" (HAH) and a few months later in a journal of the "Kommunistischer Bund" which was entitled with "Kampf der Schwulenunterdruckung". (In English: "Against the Oppression of Gays"!)

We also would like to have other papers of your group, if available. We can send you on the other side, that material you want, from West Germany. Can someone understand German? That would be good, for it's quite difficult to translate things – as you see, our English is also not brilliant.

We think that it would be useful to come in contact with other left gays – therefore this short letter. Perhaps we can exchange information about GB and FRG and write in our journals about important things. As you will know things in Germany are becoming more and more difficult. The "Modell Deutschland" (no.IV) has brought a climate of oppression and "Hexenjagd". Political oppression spreads out more and more. Also gays are – of course – not excluded. The last stroke: in March 1976 there has been a decision of the "highest court" in "matters of administration" that *can* forbid gay activity groups all over West Germany to address people with gay political papers. That means, that such activities can be stopped by the administration at each time they want. On the other hand, they have developed "new methods" in medicine, to make gays 'straight': they simply kill some spots in the brain! It is practiced already in some cities.

G. S.

Readers who would like to write can do so c/o Gay Left, 36a Craven Rd, London W2.

Gays and the CPGB

In the last issue of your paper (no.3) which was sent to me as usual from a friend in London, I found (on page 1) the sentence that "The Communist Party now has a special commission preparing a report" on homosexuality. As I read in *Gay News* no.108 (page 15) in an anti-communist article under the title "A day of shame", the CPGB edited on the 12th of September 1976 a policy statement supporting gay rights. I write to you because this matter is of much interest for me and some gay socialists here in Berlin/West. We are in permanent discussion with members of the CP of West Berlin about the ability to change the up to now more or less anti-gay policy and statements of their party.

FRIEDHELM KREY, Berlin

Too Complex, Too Jargonistic

The one criticism that I feel I must make about your journal is that through its complex construction, and sheer volume, it may well be ignored by those who, obviously, it sets out to help – in order that they may help themselves. I am not implying that the working class people do not wish to fight for what they rightly feel belongs to them – but sadly forms of suppression are often so effective that they don't really grasp the seriousness of their situation.

If the various forms of abuse against the working class people were presented to them in a strong, honest, perceptive way but in their own jargon – then they may well see the problem more clearly, often with a form of suppression that formally had been accepted illuminated and shown in its true light. Then hopefully, through the presentation, motivation towards further inquiry is provoked.

When I first read your journal I must admit that I was highly impressed by the forcefulness of it but I thought that there was too much sociological jargon used too soon – I was grateful to sociology 'A' level.

Personally I am very aware of what I feel is wrong within this society and structure of society, and of course the problem is intensified for the gay person, not only does it face vast difficulties with other political parties, but also it faces problems within its own party. This in itself makes the outlook for the individual bleak, and seemingly complex, I feel that it would help if the factual problems were presented in as simple a way as possible.

Emotionally I am prepared to fight for my freedom as an individual yet practically and in some aspects of the legal side I am quite ignorant of the facts of the situation. I do not feel in any way that I am the only one that has this problem, for I have met people in the same state of suppression, that have understood and seen even less than me.

E.F., London W4

Canadian Connection

The first three issues of *Gay Left* have been very useful to us here in Canada. Lack of information and class analysis has been one of the problems in developing an orientation for the gay liberation movement here. *Gay Left* has begun to bridge this gap for us, but much more work needs to be done. The fragmented groups of lesbian and gay leftists around the world should begin to share information and ideas in an attempt to develop a sounder analysis (incorporating gay and women's liberation into Marxism) and to develop a revolutionary strategy for the gay and lesbian struggle. We hope *Gay Left,* which already plays a very useful role, will become an important forum for this interchange (as it has already begun to with the letter from GLH[PQ] from France).

We are lesbian and gay members of the Revolutionary Marxist Group, a Canadian sympathizing organization of the Fourth International. We have fought inside our organization for the adoption of a revolutionary position on gay and sexual liberation. Some of the elements of this are the recognition of gayness as a natural component of human sexuality, a recognition that gay liberation is not simply a fight for democratic rights but involves an attack on capitalist sexual roles and the family, a recognition of the need to build an autonomous gay movement which will wage militant struggle for gay liberation but will also support women and other oppressed groups, and a recognition that real socialism is impossible without full women's and gay liberation and the transcending of the family and sexual roles. This fight has not always been easy in a predominantly straight organization, but by and large we have won.

Brian Caines, in his letter in *Gay Left* no.3, makes a number of good criticisms of the Vancouver branch of the RMG, and its relation to the gay question. However, we feel his comments about our paper, the *Old Mole,* which has had far more coverage of lesbian and gay struggles than most left organizations around the world and his suggestion that the RMG is "opportunistic" around gay liberation are unjustified. What he doesn't cover, and possibly doesn't know, is the role of RMG militants, both straight and gay, across the country. For example, in the last federal elections, our candidate in Toronto defended gay people against several right-wing bourgeois and social democratic politicians and spoke at a Gay Alliance Towards Equality all-candidates meeting. Brian also does not mention the activity of the RMG's trade union militants who have fought in several trade union locals for support of gay liberation. Finally, he does not cover the activity of lesbian and gay militants of the RMG in the gay and lesbian struggles, conferences and debates over the last couple of years. We welcome Brian's criticism of our Vancouver comrades because it raises some of the problems that our organization faces in grappling with the gay and lesbian question. He along with us can play a role in further educating the straight comrades in our organization around the importance of gay liberation.

In reference to Brian's last comments, the RMG does not view gay liberation as something workers "can't understand" but rather as an important radicalizing question that must be raised in the working class. We also don't view it as something "too hot" to handle but as a question that has a political importance in the total revolutionary process (in contributing to anti-sexist consciousness and the struggle against bureaucracy).

We are not intending to say that all gay and lesbian leftists should be members of revolutionary organizations at the present time. Far from it, for most of these organizations have very reactionary, opportunist or abstentionist positions on gay and lesbian liberation. Independent gay groups have a very important role to play right now in building a militant gay movement. We are only trying to point out that gay leftists who are members of revolutionary organizations that don't defend the family and bureaucracy can play a role in winning their organizations to support gay liberation as well as playing a role in building lesbian and gay struggles.

We look forward to continuing discussions.
LESBIAN AND GAY MEMBERS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST GROUP, Toronto, Canada

Gay Left and Women

I bought *Gay Left* in *Grass Roots Bookshop*, Manchester. It's about the best thing I've read on being gay and at the same time wanting to change capitalist society. It's not escapist or "fringe" and generally I want to be associated with it.

I appreciate very much your response to Sue Bruley's letter, and support your need for your own CR group, which is strengthened in commitment by also being a group to achieve a purpose, i.e. produce *Gay Left.* I expect it is easier for men to be sure of staying committed if there is also an objective purpose. I'm not being sexist. I just recognise the realities of socialisation for males.

You write with real understanding of the women's movement, and recognise what it can teach you and how by following its insights you can find ways into your own realities. For that I want to call you brothers, not just comrades.

What I'm busy trying to find out is how the women's movement can create its own structure as a body of people, not just a chance collection of individuals – but do it without being infiltrated by ideas, oppressions and attitudes carried in the institutions of the so-called democratic process. I think you may have something to teach me if I keep in touch with you.

Beyond that still, I'm looking for how lesbians can act together and as yet I see little sign of our ability to achieve much on more than a personal level, and often not on that. However, I know that determination and hope do achieve results, when allied to real understanding of the situation. It's undoubtedly something to do with the double oppression, with hopelessness, with a desperate reaction to it all. When we do learn how to get together for action, I expect we will be the most dynamic force of all. But I'm sure we will do it by being and discovering ourselves, as you will, and you will best help us by being and discovering yourselves and letting us see the result.
JEAN ROBERT, Lancs.

I am writing on behalf of my group in support of Sue Bruley. It seems to be impossible for you to retain your collective identity in the face of a critical analysis by a feminist. Were six separate replies really crucial to get across your points? Or was it that in your show of superior (male) numbers you hoped to dilute the impact of perceptive (feminist) criticism?

Your response was a typical example of the inability of men to share amongst themselves or to realise their inadequacies as 'brothers' to your gay sisters.
CAROL LEE, Brighton Lesbian Group

I can understand why a group of men might want to get together to discuss their sexuality and politics. However the argument for men getting together is *not* the same as that for women getting together because the oppression of men in our society is not symmetrically comparable to that of women. And it is sheer arrogance to imagine men can gain a "thorough understanding of sexism" (*GL* no.3, N.Y.'s reply to Sue Bruley's letter) by themselves. Pulling out that magical 'Marxist' cliche "it's not men who oppress women but the capitalist system" is a long-standing male cop-out and a denial of your responsibility. Of course it's the system of capitalism which oppresses us. But what do you imagine this 'system' is if not a collection of people's actions and attitudes?

Within this system it is you who oppress us as women by your actions. You do so when as a collective of gay men you presume to call your paper *Gay Left*, thereby reinforcing two prejudices: 1) that being homosexual is something only men do, and 2) that being involved in left politics is a male activity.
MARIA JASTRZEBSKA, Brighton

As a collective we decided to reply individually to Sue Bruley's criticisms for two main reasons. First we did not want to hide behind an anonymous collective identity. Secondly we wanted to show the range of discussion within the group. There was no intention to evade any of the issues raised.

It needs to be emphasised that both the collective and the journal have consistently acknowledged their debt to the women's movement and have always stated their opposition to sexism. This can be seen in the journal and in its editorial policy. At no time has it been suggested that Gay Left is only about gay men or for gay men. The continuation of the journal depends on our maintaining links and working with lesbians wherever this is possible. It is hoped that we will start on-going discussions with some of the women in Lesbian Left *in order to develop further a Marxist analysis which applies to gay women and gay men.*
Gay Left

What's Left....

THE GIRLS' GUIDE, Fourth Edition
now available from 1 North End Road, London W14. Cost £2.00. This guide is the most widely distributed lesbian publication in the world. It has over 3000 listings in 40 countries of gay organisations, bars, clubs and restaurants.

LE GROUPE DE LIBERATION HOMOSEXUEL, POLITIQUE ET QUOTIDIEN (GLH-PQ)
now has a new address – GERS, B.P.11, 75022 PARIS. CEDEX 01.
Their latest activity was *'la semaine homosexuelle'* 20-26 April 1977. Each day was organised around a separate topic; transvestites, sexual and social roles, gay women, homosexual struggles and the workers' movements, latent homosexuality, the homosexual ghetto and pederasty and children's sexuality. It included debates, films, theatre, songs, exhibitions and books.

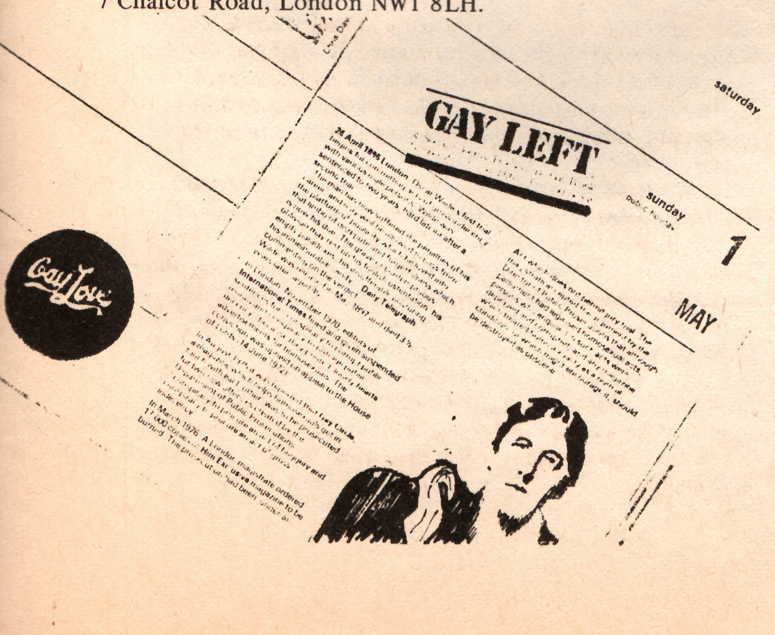
SOCIALIST HOMOSEXUALS
An Australian gay socialist contact. PO Box 153, Broadway 2007, NSW.

FREEDOM SOCIALIST PARTY
3815 5th N.E., Seattle, WA 98105. Organised a *'Gays At Work'* conference early March 1977.

MAGNUS A Journal of Collective Faggotry
We have received issue No 1 of this new journal dated Summer 1976. It is edited by a collective of 'six white faggots' and published in San Francisco. The main article asks what faggotry is and how does it fit into revolutionary struggle. It is a 'beginning attempt to understand the relationship between gay people and imperialism'.
Further information from PO Box 40568, San Francisco, California 94140, USA.

WORKING PAPERS IN SEX, SCIENCE AND CULTURE
The second issue of this journal (dated November 1976) is now on sale in Britain. (Price £1.35 from Compendium, 234 Camden High Street, London NW1). It continues its amibition of critically examining the 'function of language, ideology and scientificity in the construction of sex theories', with articles on the group TEL QUEL, Lacan, Psychoanalysis and Marxist Feminism, Althusser's Epistemology, and Consciousness-Raising as Self Pity. Available also from Box 83 Wentworth Building, 174 City Road, Darlington 2008, Australia.

BIG RED DIARY The 1977 edition is concerned with Law and Order. A bit late as a Christmas present but a good May Day gift. From Pluto Press, Unit 10, Spencer Court, 7 Chalcot Road, London NW1 8LH.



THE NEW YORK GAY SOCIALIST ACTION PROJECT
has now produced a bibliography of books, pamphlets, essays, periodicals etc, relevant to socialist gays, coordinated by Jonathan Katz. Further information from Apt 10, 51 Bank Street, New York, NY 10014, USA.

GAY AMERICAN HISTORY
by Jonathan Katz
has now been published in the USA. It's a massive compendium of documents, with commentary and extensive references. We hope to review the book in the next issue.

Lavender and Red Union, PO Box 3503, Hollywood, Califo California 90028 who publish the journal *Come Out Fighting* have over the past year had an intensive period of discussion and study and have adopted a Trotskyist position. The paper on 'Permanent Revolution' has aroused a considerable debate among American gay socialists. Further details from L & R U.

In Britain, the **International Marxist Group** has recently been having an intensive discussion of the personal and the political. The Personal/Political Grouping have recently (March 1977) produced *News from the Gyroscope,* documents from the IMG debate.

Ron Moule, filmmaker, has prepared a series of working notes – *If you read this you will read anything* and *Flicker notes.* Ron would be interested to hear from revolutionary film makers at Top Flat, 58 Burford Road, Forest Fields, Nottingham.

LESBIAN LEFT are organising a week-end conference in the autumn as a response to the interest shown at the National Women's Conference. Details from *Lesbian Left,* c/o Women's Workshop, 38 Earlham Street, London NW1. 01-836 6081.

Laurieston Hall, Castle Douglas, Kirkudbrightshire, Scotland is having a 'Gay Week' at the end of May 1977 intended as a radical gay get together. For details send SAE to the hall.

Watch out for **Gay Pride Week** in London, 25th June – 2nd July.

GAY LEFT RATES

Single Copies:

Inland	50p each
Overseas Airmail	80p each (IMO only) or $2 US or Canadian Cheque
Overseas Surface	60p each (IMO only) or $1.50 US or Canadian Cheque

Bulk Rates:
Inland, over 9 copies, 30p each
Overseas rates on application

Copies 50p each by post from 36a Craven Road, London W2

BACK ISSUES
Gay Left No 1
Gays in the Trade Unions, in Cuba, at CHE Conference, in politics.
Gay Left No 2
No longer available
Gay Left No 3
Women in Gay Left, Gays and Class, IS Gay Group, Gay Workers' Movement and much more.
Copies 40p each by post from 36A Craven Road, London W2.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The fourth issue of Gay Left has taken longer in coming out than the other three issues. This has been as a result of a conscious decision on the part of the collective to spend more time on group study, in meetings with other groups and also in going to talk sessions with groups in different parts of the country. We also decided that, despite the problems involved, it was worth spending time in jointly writing our third collective article. We feel generally that our growth and development as a group takes priority over producing the journal at strictly regular intervals.

It is not our aim to help gays to live more easily in the society in which they find themselves. Nor is it to act as a pressure group to further the sectional interests of gays, although we do not necessarily see those activities as inappropriate. In the broadest terms we wish to explore the implications of our identity as gays and its relationship to the economic and political structures which dominate our social life. In trying to understand this identity in its historical and cultural contexts we wish to link our situation with gays elsewhere and with other oppressed groups. We hope to join with those who wish social life to change so that ways of relating become more honest, more enriching, more satisfying not just for gays but for all people. Our perspective remains uncompromisingly marxist in so far as we see consumerism and commodity dominated social life as limiting factors in this development.

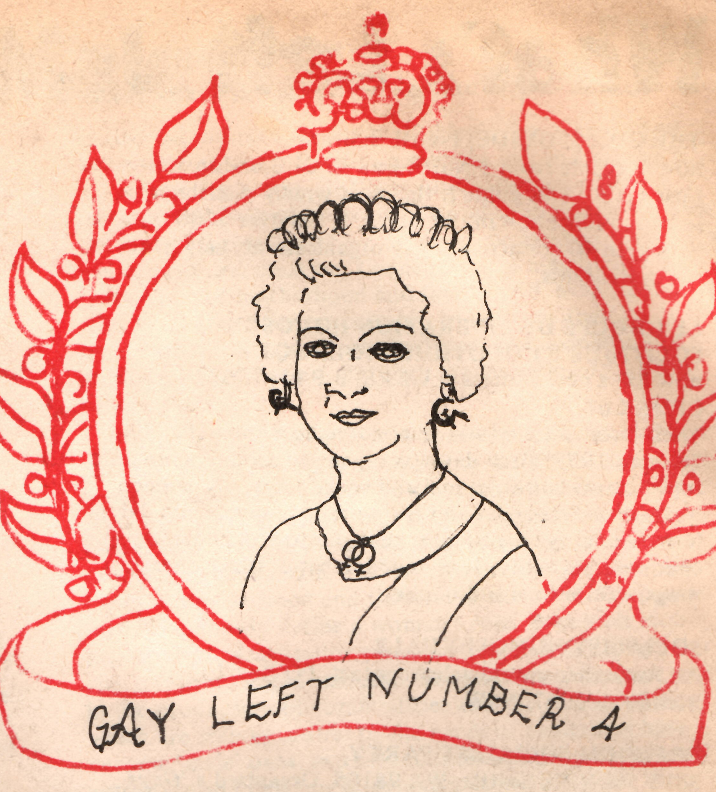
We are aware of the criticisms on the part of some of our readers that we are an all male collective and in the last issue we attempted to answer these criticisms. All of us as individuals are involved in situations at work, in trade unions or other political groups where, as gay men, we are often in a minority of one, and the group that formed the Gay Left collective arose originally from a need to be free from the constraints of a straight dominated society to express ourselves and develop our thinking. In view of our own experiences and given our commitment to the struggle against sexism the suggestion that an all male editorial collective implies a bias in favour of male gays cannot be taken lightly. We must repeat that we do not claim to be representative of all or indeed any sections that comprise the gay left. Nevertheless, we realise that in order to develop as a forum we must not only be open to contributions from all sections, but actively solicit such contributions and encourage those who are sympathetic to become involved in the work of the collective.

An important part of this involvement so far has been the readers' meetings (elsewhere we say how we want to develop this next time). At the last readers' meeting we had a discussion concerning women and Gay Left which strongly influenced us. This is a continuing debate as letters in this issue show. We are open to suggestions as to how we might extend such forums of discussion.

Contributions to the journal can take the form of illustrations as well as articles or letters. There is one proviso. We do not publish articles which are anti-socialist, anti-feminist or anti-gay. We would be grateful, also, to those who would be prepared to undertake selling *Gay Left* – particularly in areas where there are no other outlets.

PRICE RISE

This was a difficult decision. We tried to work out ways of keeping the price of this much larger *Gay Left* at 30p, but the position seemed to be this: if the price remained unchanged we would need to sell every copy printed in order to get near the projected cost of the next issue. 40p seemed the realistic price, particularly as we do not carry paid advertisements. The point needs to be made, too, that every penny we get from sales goes into basic costs and making for a bigger and, hopefully, a better journal.



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THE COLLECTIVE
This issue was put together by Keith Birch, Gregg Blachford, Bob Cant, Derek Cohen, Emmanuel Cooper, Randal Kincaid, Jeffrey Weeks, Nigel Young.

GAY LEFT CONFERENCE

The Gay Left Collective is organising a one day workshop conference on 'Socialism and the Gay Movement'. The conference will be at a venue in central London (to be announced later) on July 2nd, the Saturday ending Gay Pride Week. Full details will be in *Gay News, Time Out* and in the Gay Pride Week Publicity.

Typeset by Caroline McKechnie

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